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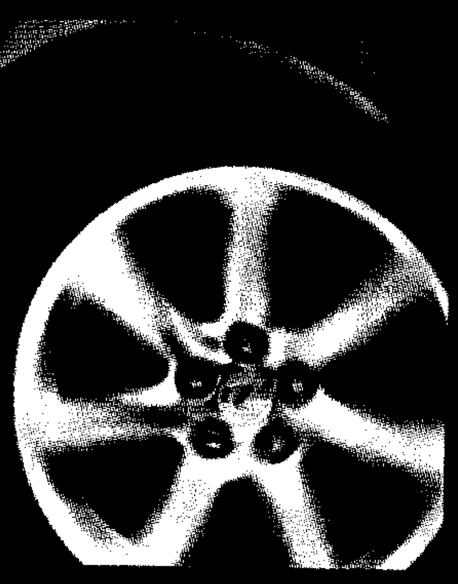

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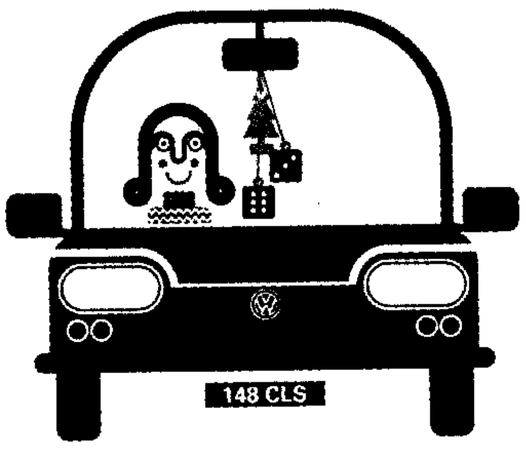

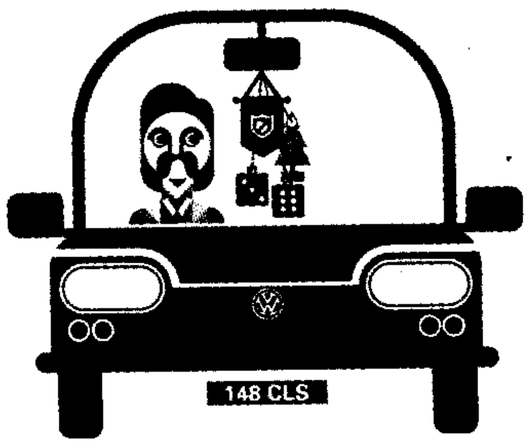

Volkswagen Thinking

Trick or treaty?

- **See him in court: Sheikhwatch** 7
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- **Fuming at Flybe; Not caring for the elderly & more: In the Back** 27, 29
- **Blood on their hands? Gavel Basher and a Health Special on hospital infections** 8, 28

FINANCIAL Services Authority chiefs reluctantly conceded last week that they didn't challenge Northern Rock sufficiently on its "business model" and overlooked critical risks in the money market that eventually forced the run on the bank. On chief executive Hector Sants's own admission: "There are lessons to be learnt here for our supervision processes."

Could this be the same inadequate regulator that was described by the National Audit Office on 30 April this year as "a well-established regulator with an impressive set of processes and structures to help tackle high-risk organisations and markets", to which NAO boss Sir John Bourn added his personal testimony: "It has created strong and effective structures"? It certainly could.

The verdict delighted the Treasury, as the then City minister Ed Balls pounced on the "independent" auditor's ringing endorsement to boast to anybody who would listen of the success of the FSA that he and Gordon had created.

How could the public spending watchdog paint such a glowing picture of a failing financial regulator? Might some "negotiations" possibly have taken place over one of the hundreds of meals-for-two at London's finest restaurants that Sir John treats his anonymous "UK contacts" to with taxpayers' money? Perish the thought.

● *Bourn with a silver spoon, 27*

IT'S not only the Beeb and ITV who happily dupe their audiences. So, it transpires, does Her Majesty's supposedly upstanding Revenue & Customs.

Anyone with questions about the proposed changes to non-domicile taxation is invited by HMRC to "telephone 0207 147 2762 or email andrew.hayward@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk". When the *Eye* called to speak to Mr Hayward an official said he was "not available" – and wouldn't be for some time. Further pressing revealed that this was because, er, there's no such person at HMRC. Andrew Hayward exists only to field awkward emails.

Fabricating identities is certainly an interesting way for a government department that loses millions every year to bogus tax credit claimants to go about its own business.

● *The non-dom non-starter, 6*

"Damn voters are just so indecisive"

NUMBER CRUNCHING

9 Years Liberals managed under leadership of man accused of conspiracy to murder

7 Years Liberals managed under leadership of alcoholic

1.5 Years Liberals managed under leadership of 66-year-old

***DAILY Mail* editor Paul Dacre, one of the few Fleet Street chiefs to like Gordon Brown, was furious when the PM was duffed up by David Cameron at the first Prime Minister's Question Time after the party conference season.**

Almost every other media outlet in the country reported it as a serious loss of face for Brown, whose backbench MPs looked thunderous throughout the session. But not the *Mail*. Columnist Peter Oborne observed sagely that: "I saw it very differently – I thought the PM responded with some dignity to a barrage of abuse and insults." Just a few pages earlier, Aussie charmer Amanda Platell also managed to agree with her editor's pro-Brown view: "There was something arrogant and unpleasant about the way the Old Etonian Cameron pulverised his opponent," she opined.

There was more of the same in the *Mail on Sunday* (ed-in-chief: P Dacre) where pisspoor Liz Jones, who has inherited Peter Dobbie's old political column, devoted much of her week's effort to informing readers that she did not fancy "braying" David Cameron. "I hate toffs," she informed us. "I can't imagine having sex with one. In fact I can safely say I have never had sex with one."

● *More Street of Shame, 6*

ANT & DECKED

"With over a decade as performers under their belts, Ant and Dec have consistently taken a keen interest in the production process, gathering invaluable experience across numerous different projects. It was this experience, coupled with an appetite for new challenges that led them to form Gallowgate." – *From the website of Gallowgate, co-producer of* Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway

"*Saturday Night Takeaway* is very much their show, where they sit down with the producers and executive producers to come up with ideas" – *Simon Jones, spokesman for Ant & Dec,* Express, *April 2007*

"If we weren't doing this, I'd still love to work in telly because I love the creative side of it, the ideas side, the behind-the-camera stuff." – *Ant McPartlin,* Guardian, *10 Sept 2005*

"Claudia Rosencrantz [Ant & Dec's then commissioning editor] adds that as well as being instinctive, they're also 'incredibly analytical' and makes the distinction of calling them performers rather than presenters because what they do is so much more than hosting the show. Rather patronisingly, I assume this is telly-speak for them sitting in the odd production meeting, but then they describe tearing up the running order for *Takeaway*, six weeks before transmission, and rewriting it to play down the 'win the ads' spine of the show and introduce all the audience participation bits such as Jim Didn't Fix It and the sketches… They intend to use Gallowgate as a long term, slow build, company to develop their ideas and put their rights into. But they're talking to production partners and individuals about developing entertainment shows, comedy dramas, all sorts." – Guardian, *October 2004*

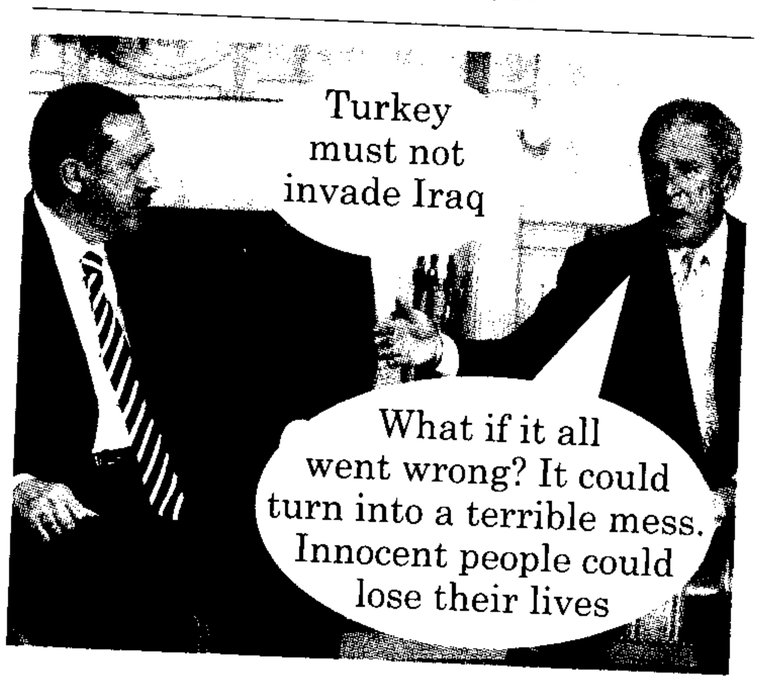
"An executive producer credit in their case is kind of a vanity credit. They were more worried about their scripts and their gags than they were about the logistics of how the phones were going to work. It's way beyond their comprehension and responsibility."

– *Michael Grade, announcing results of a report that £4m was taken from viewers in rigged competitions on* Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway

ITV is claiming at least some of the £900,000 it has to reimburse to *X-Factor* viewers whose text votes were not counted from production company Syco, owned by chief judge Simon Cowell, on the ground that it takes a share of the profits from phone votes on the series.

This will hardly please Cowell's agents, James Grant, who by an astonishing coincidence are the largest shareholder in Riva Digital Media, a provider of phone and text services to, among others… ITV and *X-Factor.*

● *Laying a Reith: BBC special 10, 11*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ABC

NEWS

CAMPAIGNERS for Britain's Iraqi translators were appalled at ministers' reluctance to offer them asylum in the UK. But this is nothing new. Freedom of Information papers obtained by the *Eye* show the Foreign Office has always had one eye on keeping them out.

In January 2003, when the US asked Britain to marshal volunteers for a "Free Iraqi Forces" group to assist military action, the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw packed them off to train in a NATO compound in Hungary – anything to keep them off British soil. The released Foreign Office papers show Straw feared the men would never leave again. One, called "Lines to Take", states: "We considered it unnecessary to marshal recruits in the UK… We were also conscious of the risk of the volunteers claiming asylum in the UK." There was a long correspondence about how, if fighters did indeed fly in from America and try to stay instead of going on to Iraq, it would be "advisable to secure written agreement from the USA to accept them back".

Alas, the Free Iraqi Forces, organised by the Iraqi National Congress, turned out to be just as dubious as everything else connected with the INC. Only 80 or so men were trained instead of the promised 3,000, and rather than support the military action they became a small personal army for the slippery Ahmed Chalabi – yet another Iraq war failure.

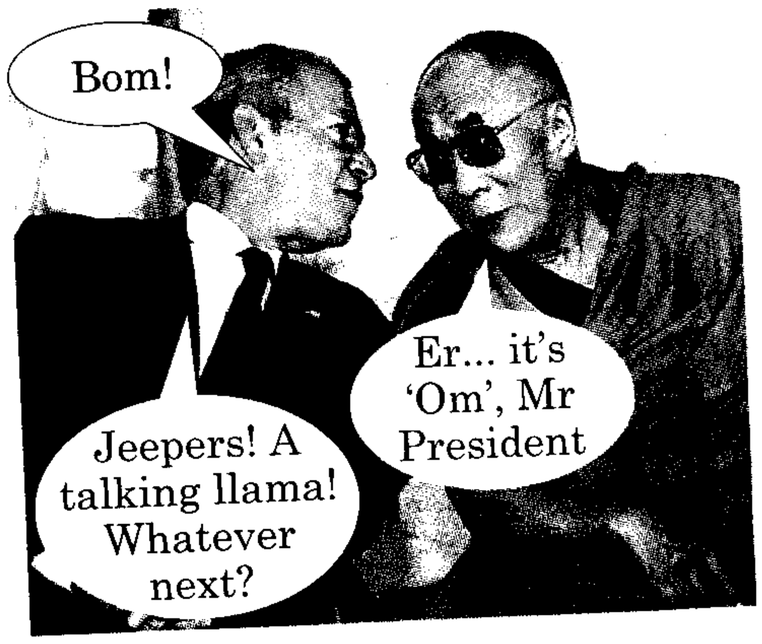
NEWS that only 4,000 of Britain's 125,000 "non-doms" will pay Alistair Darling's £30,000 levy is a dream outcome for the likes of Labour donors Lakshmi Mittal and Sir Ronald Cohen.

Not only does it ignore 86 percent of non-doms and amount to barely a pin-prick for those who are caught, but it draws a line under an awkward political issue. Or does it?

The move won't go down well on the continent where UK non-dom rules still fit the EU definition of "harmful tax competition" signed up to by Gordon Brown. Allowing people to come into your country and not pay tax on their foreign income allows tax dodgers to escape tax anywhere; and the Italian government is even considering a challenge to the rules following the case of motorcycle champion Valentino Rossi.

He claimed to be resident but non-domiciled in Britain which, he said, got him off any Italian tax on his vast fortune while he paid just a few hundred pounds to the Revenue here. The Italian authorities are chasing him for £40m. But if he genuinely moved to tax haven Britain, he could continue to escape both Italian and British taxmen as the one kind of immigrant who is always welcome here: the international tax exile.

BUSH AIMS FOR INNER PEACE



Street Of Shame

THE *Daily Telegraph* was quick to join attacks on the BBC and suggest where it could save money, pointing in particular at the Beeb's web output (easily its least expensive area of operation).

The newspaper – or 24/7 multi-platform news hub as it calls itself these days – focused sniffily on a bunch of harmless online features like "An investigation into whether the 'Shapes Contour Panty really does give you the bum of Jennifer Lopez"; a test to find out how clever your pet is; and a message board debate on where the best beach in Cornwall is to eat a Cornish pasty.

How very different to the content of the *Telegraph*'s own website – like its vid of hackette Rebecca Newman being measured for a new bra; a page on how to train your cat to use the toilet; and a blog inviting readers to "imagine Boris Johnson in your kitchen". Oh, and don't forget the "selection of your favourite chicken jokes".

Perhaps editor Will Lewis could offer to replace the 500 or so BBC news staff who are to lose their jobs with the services of his own "Telegraph TV". It was set up to "provide a different sort of programming for the millions of people in the UK who don't believe in the leftwing prism" – or, indeed, in presentational skills or production values, consisting as it does of a series of clips of seedy-looking print hacks stuttering nervously into a camcorder from the middle of a newspaper office.

IRWIN STELZER'S sole claim to fame as a pundit is that he is a paid adviser and close confidant of Rupert Murdoch. If he publicly praises Gordon Brown or David Cameron, it is widely acknowledged that he is speaking for the Dirty Digger.

However, Stelzer appeared to have forgotten his master when he wrote an article for the latest *Spectator* attacking Tory and Labour plans to increase the threshold for inheritance tax. "Inheritance taxes make good economic sense," Stelzer opined. "The parent who leaves his son enormous wealth generally deadens the talents and energies of the son and tempts him to lead a less useful and less worthy life than he otherwise would."

Could Stelzer by any chance be thinking of a certain media mogul who used a family trust fund to give his six children $100m each in shares in News Corporation in February of this year? Surely not.

Meanwhile, further signs of absentminded *lèse majesté* at the *Sun*, with its editorial comment last week that Ming Campbell's resignation "proved there is no room for pensioners in today's cut-throat politics" – or, implicitly, in other cut-throat arenas such as the international media biz.

Ming the pensioner, as the *Sun* gleefully pointed out, is 66. The Dirty Digger is, er, 76.

BUOYED by an impressive set of sales figures for the month of August – 30,000 up on July and a mere 200,000 down from when Richard Desmond took over as proprietor seven years ago – *Daily Express* editor Peter Hill recently wrote to advertisers encouraging them to "join the crusade" by signing deals with his title.

Its good fortunes were, he boasted, entirely of his own making: "No CD's [sic] or other marketing gimmicks: all achieved by investment in content."

So presumably it's another *Daily Express* entirely which has shed more than 50 staff since Hill took over, outsourced several departments to the Press Association, slashed editorial budgets and, since August, offered its readers: a set of eight "learn to speak Italian" CDs; five Sherlock Holmes DVDs; "Free Sweets from Woolworths"; a "Free Indian Meal and beer with our great 2-for-1 deal"; "Great discounts at family attractions for every reader"; "£9.50 family holidays"; "Free fish and chips for every reader"; a "Free kid's night safety pack"; "Free Glucosamine tablets"; and "50% off quality carpets with Carpet Right".

RICHARD "Dirty" Desmond, who paid himself a well-merited £40m last year, is now a big earner as a landlord too: he has successfully let out all the available office space in his City HQ, on the banks of the Thames.

With an extra 800 German and Japanese stockbrokers working in the former HSBC building, along with hacks from the *Express* and *Daily Star*, the elevators are taking a bit of a pounding. The glass lifts are well overdue their 20 years' service anyway, and in need of complete refurbishment. Desmond, who enjoys exclusive use of his own private lift, has asked an aide to investigate the possibility during the refurbishment of "pimping his ride", so to speak, enabling him to rise to his 10th floor penthouse in just 10 seconds.

When the chairman's reasonable request was conveyed to an on-site engineer, he replied that he wasn't sure if it could be done – but he could certainly get the lift to leave the 10th and hit the ground in well under 10 seconds if Dirty Des would like that.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"BBC to screen <u>more</u> repeats"
– Daily Mail, 18 October 2007

"BBC resort to more repeats"
– Daily Mail, 4 July 2007

"£4 rise in BBC licence means more repeats"
– Daily Mail, 19 January 2007

"BBC owns up to showing 10% more repeats"
– Daily Mail, 14 July 2004

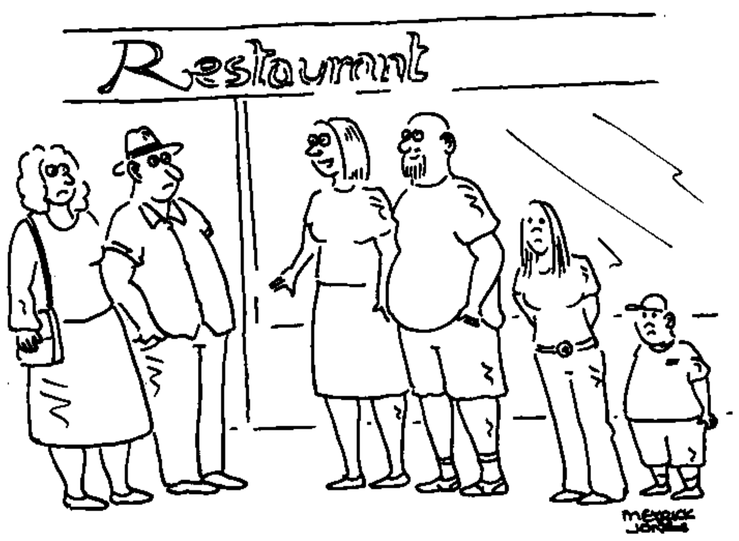
" BBC to run even more repeats"
– Daily Mail, 23 July 1992

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

"MADELEINE PARENTS IN THE CLEAR: New shock on DNA evidence"
– Daily Express front page, 8 October

"MADELEINE: DNA PUTS PARENTS IN THE FRAME"
– Daily Express front page, 9 October

"Always a nice touch – the complementary copy of the Daily Mail"



"Eating out is always a problem. Chloe's a vegan, little Bobby's wheat intolerant, and Robert only eats ants"

BARCLAYS is an interesting choice of partner for the *Guardian*'s mission to transform the Ugandan village of Katine over the next three years. The bank has promised to "make a big difference to the community there" by improving access to financial services and matching readers' donations.

However, Barclays' recent record in Africa is far from glowing. In June, the *Guardian* itself reported that Barclays' £380m shares in firms working in Sudan's oil sector were helping to arm the Janjaweed and military operations, and thus funding genocide.

And earlier in the year the *Observer* reported that Barclays was "one of the Mugabe government's biggest private financiers", propping up the Zimbabwean regime with loans and purchases of government bonds.

THE *Grauniad* has lined up the great and good to judge its Public Service Awards, but one of the panel has a history of making her mind up too soon.

Catherine McLoughlin chaired the kangaroo court (*"disciplinary hearing", shurely? Ed*) that dismissed whistleblower Ian Perkin from St Georges Healthcare NHS Trust in 2002, despite having already expressed her intent to get rid of him (*Eye* 1145). Perkin was dismissed after revealing how the trust fiddled statistics on cancelled operations.

Although the industrial tribunal appeal in 2005 upheld the dismissal, Lord Justice Wall said he found it "quite extraordinary" that McLoughlin thought it right to chair an internal disciplinary procedure in the circumstances, adding: "The overwhelming and irresistible inference is that she not only wanted him out, but was of the view that this was the speediest and most effective way of achieving her objective."

Let's hope she waits to see the competition entries before picking a winner for the *Guardian*.

EIGHTEEN months after she announced the demise of Coldplay – an event which, irritatingly for music fans, has yet to occur – *Sun* showbiz supremo Victoria Newton had news of another shock split in the world of rock.

"The future of Razorlight doesn't look too sharp – I can reveal Johnny Borrell is working on solo projects," she trumpeted on 15 October. "On Friday he teamed up with Lily Allen to sing in north London's Paradise pub. While Lily and another girl delivered harmonies, he belted out some new tunes. The secret gig was the latest of several shows that Johnny has done without his band."

Quite a scoop – save for the minor facts that the "secret" solo gig had been well publicised for a month beforehand, the band dismiss talk of a split as "complete rubbish", and despite one of the gig's promoters noticing Allen in the audience and joking that he "should ask her to get up on stage and sing," she, er, didn't.

"AL-QAEDA terrorists are plotting to bomb a Premiership football game LIVE on British TV," revealed a breathless *News of the World* on 14 October.

"They know the awful sight of grounds like Chelsea's Stamford Bridge or Manchester United's Old Trafford in flames will flash around the world just like the 9/11 Twin Towers outrage... A top-placed security source revealed: 'We have concrete intelligence that al-Qaeda is planning an attack that would be seen live on television'."

We can only hope this particular source is as unreliable as the one who informed the paper's stablemate the *Sun* back in April 2004 that "suicide bombers who plotted a massacre at Old Trafford" had been "dramatically foiled" by police. In that instance, 10 Iraqi Kurds arrested by police turned out to have tickets to the ground for no more sinister reason than that they were Manchester United fans who had attended matches there. All ten were released without charge, with police insisting: "We have never said that there is a plot against Old Trafford."

SHEIKHWATCH

THERE is swelling indignation in America at the threat to free speech posed by Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz, the litigious Saudi billionaire whose exploits as a "libel tourist" were chronicled in *Eye* 1193.

In the past couple of weeks the *New York Times* has run two articles about the sheikh's use of British libel laws to suppress books which mention him, regardless of whether the books are actually published in this country.

His most recent victims are the American authors J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, whose academic study of Islamic charities, *Alms for Jihad*, was pulped three months ago. "The case is fanning widespread concern that English libel law is stifling writers far beyond the borders of the United Kingdom," the *New York Times* reported, adding that "when it comes to libel tourism, bin Mahfouz is something of a frequent flier".

The *Times* also drew attention to the absurd case of Deborah Ehrenfeld, who was sued in London over her book *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It*. It wasn't published in the UK but 23 copies found their way here through Amazon orders – enough for bin Mahfouz's energetic lawyers to swing into action. As Ehrenfeld didn't enter a defence, refusing to recognise a British court's jurisdiction over an American publication, Mahfouz won the case by default. She was ordered to pay him damages and costs.

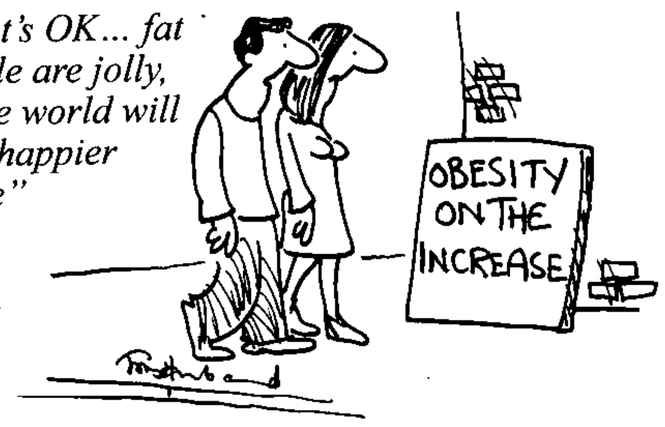
But now the tables are turned, with Ehrenfeld suing the sheikh in New York on the grounds that the judgment in London is "unenforceable in the United States and repugnant to the First Amendment".

The American academic Deborah Lipstadt, who successfully defended a famous libel suit brought by David Irving, wrote a column for the *New York Times* on 11 October noting that until bin Mahfouz came along "American authors and publishers thought that unless their books were actually published in Britain, they would not be subject to its rather draconian libel laws... Now it appears that wealthy and powerful people who object to a book can simply find a country with sympathetic laws, have a book shipped there and sue."

She urged Congress to pass legislation preventing any American court – state or federal – from enforcing libel judgments issued by foreign courts, "so that anyone wishing to sue an American for libel must do so in the United States. This would be an exception to our usual practice with regard to British court judgments, which are usually enforced here. But because the differences in American and British libel laws are drastic, special protections are needed to uphold our tradition of free speech."

Stirring stuff: as the paper commented, Mahfouz's behaviour is becoming an "international *cause célèbre*". Except, it might have added, in the country whose laws he is exploiting. Three months after the pulping of *Alms for Jihad*, the controversy hasn't been mentioned in a single British national newspaper. An *Observer* column on the subject was stopped by the paper's lawyers, as was a long piece in the *Spectator*. Now the *Eye* learns that a similar article for the *Economist* has also been spiked. Who'll be the first editor in the Street of Shame to summon up some courage?

"That's OK... fat people are jolly, so the world will be a happier place"



THE ZZZ-LIST

An occasional column devoted to the least exciting items of celebrity gossip in the national press. Readers' contributions welcomed.

"All the GIRLS ALOUD beauties donned colour coordinated frocks for a sexy promo shoot yesterday. But while Nicola Roberts's bandmates all showed off their bronzed pins, she covered up hers with a pair of thick black tights. Maybe she had forgotten to shave. Or had not found time to get to a tanning salon."

- Bizarre column, Sun, *18 October*

LOTTERY WINNERS

PUPILS from posh fee-paying independent school Guernsey Ladies College are enjoying an educational trip to Canada, at the expense of UK National Lottery players.

The Big Lottery-funded *Their Past Your Future* scheme is run by the Imperial War Museum to take kids on an all-expenses-paid school trips to learn about 20th century wars. Exactly the kind of good cause the National Lottery ought to be funding, perhaps, but given how many UK schools struggle to afford any school trips at all, why the girls from Guernsey? The Channel Islands do not even take part in the lottery.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SHORTLY before Ming Campbell's assassination, the *Independent*'s political sketchwriter Simon Carr fell into conversation with Lib Dem MP Vince Cable.

A postprandial Carr amiably told Cable that the party's leadership had some problems with image and public recognition. "I mean, Vince, if I don't know who your deputy leader is, how are most voters meant to? Who is it?"

There was a second's awkward silence before Cable replied: "Er, that would be me, actually, Simon."

THOUSANDS of north Londoners have just received a letter from Emily Thornberry, Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, boasting about the sterling work she does for her constituents.

She encloses a questionnaire which lists six of her priorities, inviting recipients to "please tick the three which you think are the most important". They include more affordable housing, safer tube stations, more CCTV for Islington and, er, "Marine Bill to protect our seas" – possibly not Islingtonians' top priority. She also asks which of Gordon Brown's "new ideas to change Britain" they support. "Your views are important to me. Please return the enclosed card – no stamp needed."

Who will pay for the Freepost replies? She doesn't say. But it's clear who paid for the mailing: the envelopes have been put through the franking machine at the Communications Workers' Union in London SW19, miles from her constituency.

In the current register of members' interests, Thornberry says nothing about any sponsorship from the CWU. However, at Prime Minister's Questions on 25 July this year she asked Gordon Brown to "join me in urging Royal Mail to enter into meaningful discussions with the Communication Workers' Union" and thus ensure that their jobs, pay and conditions are protected. Next time she speaks up for the CWU in the House, no doubt she will declare her financial interest.

AFTER Home Secretary Jacqui Smith met teenagers from the UK Youth Parliament this month, the government spin machine spooled out the usual press releases, subtly tailored to each region.

Hence newspapers in the south east were sent a long quote from Dan Kent, youth parliament member for Sutton, beginning: "This has been a chance for the Home Secretary to meet some young people who have been affected by gun and knife crime and to hear about our experiences and the ideas we have to tackle this violent behaviour."

Meanwhile in the West Midlands the press release quoted Staffordshire's Natalie Hall saying that: "This has been a chance for the Home Secretary to meet some young people..." and carried on, word for word, the same.

And so it went around the country. So much for Gordon Brown's new listening politics and hearing what young people really have to say about issues.

LIKE a credit card for a shopaholic, the irresistible allure of PFI for a chancellor on a tight budget is that it allows a spending splurge to be announced without immediate cost. So once again, as for the last 10 years under Brown, the PFI industry is the big winner from Alistair Darling's comprehensive spending review.

The Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative remains flavour of the month. Over the next three years £4bn of "PFI credits" will be allocated, subsidising local authorities' bills for schools built under the scheme, even though the credits will actually be payable over the decades the PFI contracts run.

The government's persistence with BSF programme baffles many. Fiendishly complex contracts imposed on schools have left it years behind schedule, with deals typically taking three years to negotiate before a brick is laid. George Osborne, the shadow chancellor, was able to point out that this year just 14 of the planned 100 new schools will open. Even that's optimistic: one has so far – in Bristol last month with a then buoyant PM naturally rolling up to unveil it.

MEANWHILE the chancellor's desperation not to breach his debt limits, to which he's sailing perilously close, continues to determine the most crucial public investment decisions.

More than £1bn is needed for waste recycling projects if the UK is to hit its EU landfill targets. To pay for it outright would run up a similar level of unwanted debt, so PFI and its off-balance sheet magic once again rides to the rescue. Sustainable waste management paid for with unsustainable PFI deals.

Elsewhere, the MoD has handed control of the £13bn "future strategic air tanker", an in-flight fighter jet refuelling system, to a private consortium not for any strategic defence reason but just so the PFI accountancy trick can be played. Such are the risks in the deal that ordinarily it would have to stay on the government's books. But clever Whitehall beancounters spotted that by ensuring that the companies own the planes at the end of the 27-year contract, they can stay off the books. One official admitted to *The Business* magazine that: "The government can't afford [to keep the aircraft] from an accounting point of view. They normally would."

CALLED TO ORDURE

LABOUR backbenchers don't seem much fussed about the mass deaths in Kent from hospital bug *Clostridium difficile*. At Prime Minister's Questions they yarooed and chortled and slapped their knees when David Cameron raised the matter. And when the Commons held an emergency statement on the *C. difficile* deaths, just nine Labour MPs (excluding ministers and PPSs) bothered to turn up in the chamber.

Mind you, that was nine more than attended a recent parliamentary debate on hospital closures.

Patricia Hewitt, who was Health Secretary when the deaths happened and whose Health Department had detailed warnings about the Maidstone hospital crisis, was nowhere to be seen for the *C. difficile* statement. This was hardly surprising: we have come to expect little from simpering Aussie Patricia. But a braver politician might have felt it her duty to attend.

The *C. diff* debate presented a tricky half-hour for Hewitt's successor, Alan Johnson, particularly given the lack of support from his own MPs. We won't say Johnson came clean about the Kent infections – "clean" is a word to be avoided in such a sorry tale of official failing – but Johnson accepted it had been an "appalling" and "dreadful" episode, "a horror story".

Maidstone's Tory MP Ann Widdecombe (Con) pointed out that she had raised detailed questions about the ghastly state of her local hospital in a Commons debate back in January. Why had it taken the Department of Health so long to do something about it? Should the hospital's top managers not have been chucked out then? Johnson wrung his hands.

La Widdecombe, who pronounces C. difficile in the proper Latin way, brushed the lint off her bosom and let fly with a lecture about the powers of the ward sister. And what a ward sister she'd have made. A turbo-charged Hattie Jacques.

Johnson conceded that staff at Maidstone had told some patients to "go in their beds" rather than waiting for someone to take them to the lavatory. The secretary of state was clearly as horrified by this as everyone else. Johnson has a direct, decent manner and his use of unfussy language helped him. Hewitt and her predecessor John Reid would have cut far less convincing figures at the despatch box (Hewitt would have patronised everyone; Reid would have picked a fight). But Johnson's performance did not disguise a worrying question: why were Widdecombe's complaints in January not taken up actively by the Department of Health at once? What is the point of Commons debates if Whitehall ignores them?

There was a bad moment when Johnson flared up at the Tories' frontbencher, Andrew Lansley, for daring to suggest that government "targets" had helped to cause the problems in Kent. "That's typical of the opposition at the moment!" shouted Johnson, colour suddenly rising in his cheeks. "I'm sorry Mr Speaker, but it IS," he added, all peevish. Er, maybe; but targets are also mentioned in the official report into the Maidstone deaths.

Johnson also tried repeatedly to pin the blame for a problem with hand-washing hygiene standards at Maidstone on to consultants – ie posh Tory doctors – rather than Labour-voting nurses who, the original Healthcare Commission report said, were in short supply and often too busy to clean their hands properly.

The other irksome moment came when Widdecombe was given the floor. Strictly she should have limited herself to one question but the Speaker often allows leeway in special cases. Given how many of her constituents had been killed, this was plainly such a case.

Kevan Jones (Lab, N Durham) thought otherwise. "Speech!" he shouted, showing that he felt Widdecombe was going on too long. Jones was smartly put back in his box by Speaker Martin – and quite right too. It was an idiotic remark, entirely characteristic of Jones.

The political danger may have passed but it was not clear all the legal or clinical problems had been solved. Norman Lamb, for the Lib Dems, wanted to know if bereaved families would be compensated. David Winnick (Lab, Walsall N) wanted charges brought against the responsible hospital executives. Richard Taylor (Ind, Wyre Forest) asked if the Department of Health knew of any link between *C. difficile* outbreaks and nurse/patient ratios. Johnson was unable to say.

Conclusion? Do avoid NHS hospitals for the time being if you can.

'Gavel Basher'

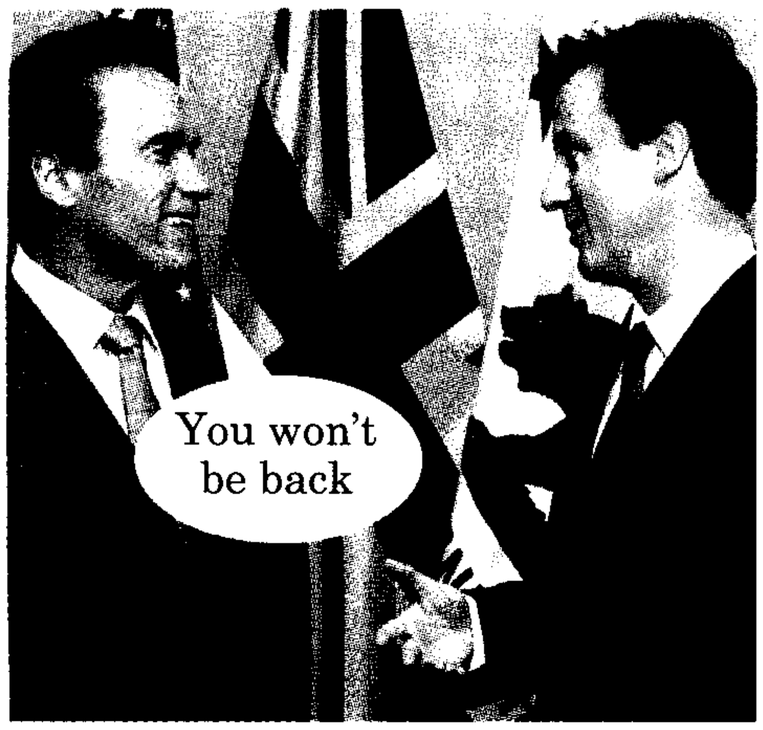
A LITTLE noticed Home Office announcement brings the registration of births, marriages and deaths into the ID card system – appropriately enough on April Fool's Day next year.

The General Register Office will leave its home in the Office of National Statistics and become part of the Identity and Passport Service. Home Office minister Meg Hillier says this will push forward cooperation with the Home Office's identity programme and "fully realise the benefits of combining registration of life events in England and Wales and the issuing of passports".

The Identity and Passport Service will, of course, soon develop the ID card, so with a database containing marriages and births as well it would possess something that not only lists individuals but can round them up electronically through family relationships.

The civil liberties implications are serious, but all is not lost. After all, a £6m system for registering births, marriages and deaths, known as RON, was suspended soon after its introduction this May as too many users slowed and crashed the system. The introduction of the ID card will involve a much bigger and more expensive database, creating the opportunity for a much bigger crash.

TERMINATOR GIVES TORIES HOPE



REPUBLICANS FOR BROWN

THE flirtation of American nuclear corporation Fluor with Britain's Labour party has blossomed into full-blown romance now that former cabinet minister Ian McCartney has accepted a £110,000-a-year job as "senior adviser".

Fluor is essentially a Republican firm. Its president of global public affairs, J. Robert Fluor II, is an active member of the Orange County Republicans; its senior vice president for government relations was formerly an assistant to two Republican congressmen; and the company gives financial support to George Bush's Republicans. So it's an unlikely match for McCartney, who still describes himself as a "socialist".

Despite the apparent political divide, Fluor wants help winning nuclear decommissioning contracts in the UK and McCartney wants to more than double his MP's salary. As well as giving McCartney a job, donating directly to the Labour party, Fluor Corporation also hosted a meeting with on-message Labour MP Emily Thornberry at the last Labour party conference.

ANOTHER friend of Gordon Brown, Martin O'Neill, a Labour MP until 2005 who now sits in the Lords, has joined a rival Republican-oriented American corporation.

O'Neill is a paid adviser to the Washington Group, another US giant chasing British nuclear contracts. The Washington Group, like Fluor, financially backs the Republicans and did well from Iraq "reconstruction" contracts too.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

IT IS becoming increasingly apparent that the EU budget review launched by the European Commission earlier this year will be largely cosmetic.

It was Tony Blair who in 2005 secured a promise to carry out a review as part of a deal on EU spending plans which are fixed until 2013.

But with Tony out of the picture, promises are being watered down. The commission has said there should be "no taboos" in discussing the budget, but will give no guarantee about if or when any recommendations might be acted on, saying only that the review will be for "the decades ahead".

Furthermore, the commission has also launched a "CAP health check" – or review of the biggest single consumer of EU funds, the Common Agricultural Policy. But this will report only at the end of 2008, meaning its findings will not be incorporated into the budget review, which is due for publication in 2008 or early 2009.

Now, researchers at a Brussels economic think tank, Bruegel, have found another reason for the commission's obfuscation. One third of EU money is spent on giving a leg-up to poor regions, thus reducing economic disparities. But does this work? As Bruegel discovered, nobody really knows because nobody reports back to the commission with data on the impact of the funds.

This makes it impossible to judge the merits of the policy of funding lagging regions, to compare regions or even to separate the impact of EU funds from other factors. It also means there is no real evidence for assessing if regional development money really needs to be churned through Brussels, or if cash should simply be "re-nationalised" for member states to pursue home-grown programmes. No wonder the commission doesn't want too much light shed on this embarrassing gap.

We've made the debate so dull the public are too bored to demand a referendum

THE new European Union reform treaty has been agreed so speedily nobody seems to have looked at the question of freedom of information. Given Brussels' love of secrecy in one recent case, that's a pity.

The EU commission is supposed to be in the middle of a transparency drive, yet it has recently tried to interfere in a Swedish court ruling over genetically modified crops. The commission demanded to know why the Swedish authorities had released sensitive information about an authorisation application for a GM crop. The answer? In Sweden, openness is a basic right.

Ulf Oberg, a former legal aide at the European Court of Justice, has commented in an open letter to the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*: "We're very worried that the freedom of information provisions seems to have gone missing from the new treaty. The current draft is in many ways a step back."

The chair of the UK parliament's European scrutiny committee, Labour MP Michael Connarty, made a similarly alarming observation in the committee's report on 9 October. He feared that safeguards on the EU constitution would "leak like a sieve".

The Swedish case reveals how attitudes to Freedom of Information vary widely. The commission in Brussels is keen to keep quiet about the letter it sent early in October concerning documents Sweden had released describing animal testing of a GM corn developed by Monsanto. The commission gave Sweden two months to respond and threatened legal action after that.

The documents were originally obtained by Greenpeace from the Swedish Board of Agriculture. Greenpeace subsequently published an independent analysis of Monsanto's testing procedures, claiming significant deficiencies.

Under EU rules GM authorisation applications can be filed in any member state, and the details are then circulated throughout the 27 country bloc. In this case Monsanto submitted an application in the Netherlands, requesting it be kept secret. A first Greenpeace request to the Dutch authorities for the documents was refused. The green lobbyist then turned to Sweden, which by law has to be more forthcoming.

The commission intervention threatens to provoke a clash between Brussels and a fundamental tenet of a member state's national sovereignty. A commission spokeswoman told the *Eye* it was a "rather complicated situation" and the letter to Sweden was "to gather information." But did the commission act with prodding from Monsanto? "Some exchanges between Monsanto and the commission" took place before the letter went out. And, in the cause of transparency, will the commission publicly release the letter? No: it's "confidential".

A NEW KIND OF POLITICS

GORDON BROWN's determination to disassociate himself from the discredited former regime in Downing Street has been nowhere more apparent than in his determination to abandon the economic ideas of whatever idiot had the job of Chancellor before June this year.

Gord giveth...	**Gord taketh away...**
1998: introduced capital gains tax taper relief to "send a clear signal of support for enterprise to those who invest in the United Kingdom"	2007: abolished
1999: introduced 10% starting rate of income tax so that "Nearly two million people will see their income tax bills cut in half"	2007: abolished
2000: introduced "new, fairer" Air Passenger Duty, lower for economy passengers and doubled for business class travelers	2007: abolished in favour of taxing flights instead of passengers

But then of course:

Gord Taketh Away...	**Gord giveth...**
2006: announces a rise in inheritance tax threshold to £325,000 by 2010 is sufficient because "94% of estates will pay none"	2007: announces a rise in inheritance tax threshold to £700,000 by 2010 is possible "and I can do more"

FTVE

Spooks (BBC1)

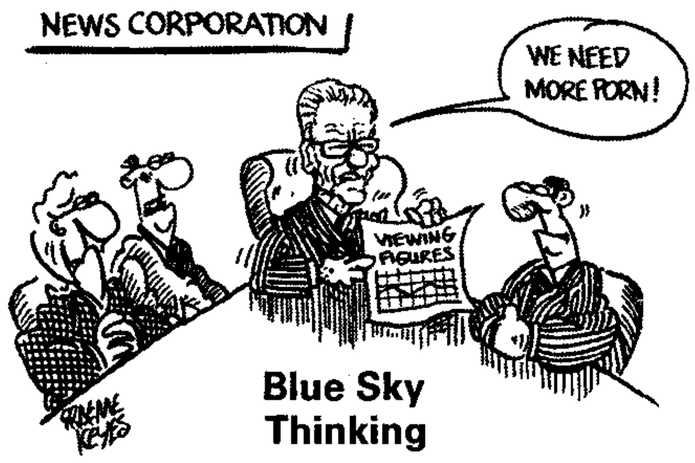
THE story doing the rounds of writers' watering holes is that a leading screenwriter was recently called in by the BBC for exploratory talks on adapting a thriller in which Al-Qaeda launches a devastating attack on the British establishment, attempting to kill most of the Cabinet and royal family in one go.

He was told there was a "narrative problem", which was that the drama department really liked the book but that the baddies could not be adapted as written because this might encourage "Islamophobia" and would be "a problem with the editorial policy boys". So the planners of the bloody coup d'état needed to be someone else.

Well, if that were the case, suggested the hack, you would probably be looking at animal rights activists, although there would have to be doubt about whether the pet-obsessives really had it in them to send suicide bombers to the Houses of Parliament. No, no, no, he was reassured: they liked what he was saying, but the problem was that the anti-vivisectionists had already stood in for Muslim terrorists on episodes of *Holby City*, *Waking the Dead* and *Dalziel and Pascoe*.

Eventually, in a desperate attempt to prevent this assignment going to Andrew Davies with all the rest, the adapter murmured that, seeing as Fathers 4 Justice had once thrown condoms full of purple flour at Tony Blair, might there be a possibility that they would graduate to something stronger? "Hey, now you're talking," came the reply. And so, at some point in the near future, viewers may be asked to believe that the likeliest architects of regicide in Britain are a couple of blokes in anoraks pissed off that their former Missus won't let them take Darren train-spotting when they want.

This increasing nervousness about showing the world as it really is poses a big problem for **Spooks (BBC1)**, which is now in its sixth season of depicting MI5's best – or, at least, best-looking – at work. For reasons of realism, spy supremo Harry Pearce (Peter Firth) and his boys and girls are clearly going to have to be shown fighting the "war on terror", but the official policy in the drama department



Blue Sky Thinking

is that the country is at more risk from dads denied access and gerbil-lovers angry about how lipstick gets made than from Osama bin Laden.

The solution to this on *Spooks* is the "rogue element". UK mosques are peaceful places of prayer but some nutter, very possibly an agent provocateur from a far-right group, has turned some young men in the hope of encouraging "Islamophobia" here. Another episode established British anti-abortion campaigners as sensitive and peaceful souls who had the misfortune to be infiltrated by a "rogue element" from a far-right pro-life group in California, who simply didn't understand that the British foetus police aren't like that.

Although potentially repetitive as a dramatic McGuffin, this is bloody clever because it incorporates into the plot the editorial policy guidelines about the risk of defaming religious and ethnic groups.

So, in the opening episode of year six, here we go again. The generally gentle and sensitive Iranian government has signed up to a peace deal and nuclear non-proliferation treaty in the Middle East. But, unfortunately, a "rogue element" in Iran is determined to scupper the peace with a terrorist attack on Tehran. If memory serves, a similarly unrepresentative faction among the generally pacifist Irish people tried to wreck a peace settlement in an earlier season of *Spooks*.

But that echo of an earlier episode exposes another problem with *Spooks*, which is that baddies setting off bangs is now pretty commonplace to a viewer, so the point here was that the suicide-bomber was also a biological bomb, infected with bubonic plague. But – wouldn't you know – he failed to die and ended up in the hands of the UK security services, who, while escorting him back to London, were jumped and lost him.

That twist touches on another problem for the show which is that, for reasons of both parochialism and budget, the series is set in MI5 rather than MI6 and so always has to come back to London as quickly as possible. And so, within the hour, Harry was able to look out mournfully on the streets of the British capital and speak one of those lines of dialogue written mainly for use in the trailer: "A mediaeval plague at loose on the streets of London! Unless we find him, millions may die!"

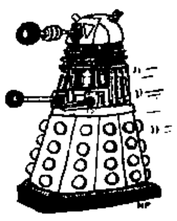
But *Spooks* itself has a deadly secret, which Equity will be hoping doesn't get out. While all the media attention in the BBC crisis has gone to Jonathan Ross's dosh, quite astonishing sums of money are spent on acting talent. On a one-hour peak-time drama, the David Jasons, Trevor Eves and James Nesbitts can easily be pulling down at least five thousand pounds a minute. But *Spooks* – like *Silent Witness* – proves that fiction with a strong concept can easily survive the departure of all its stars, the ratings scarcely affected by the loss of Matthew McFadyen and Keeley Hawes.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

- *National Lottery Jet Set, BBC1*
- **Eamonn Holmes**: What is the capital of Cyprus?
- **Contestant** (after much thought): Athens.
- **Holmes**: Which British island group are Tresco and St Mary's part of?
- **Contestant**: The West Indies.
- *BBC Radio Leeds*
- **Graham Liver**: In which country is Charles de Gaulle airport?
- **Contestant**: Russia.
- *The Weakest Link, BBC1*
- **Anne Robinson**: In which European mountain range does the Matterhorn stand?
- **Contestant**: The Himalayas.
- **Robinson**: What is the most northerly city in the British Isles?
- **Contestant**: Italy.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"HAVING looked at our own activity via the lens of *find, play and share* we came to these conclusions. It is essential that we re-construct the architecture of bbc.co.uk to increase findability and to do that we need to maximise the routes in to content.

"We must establish the tools that allow share behaviours – and so harness the power of our audience and the network to make our content more findable. We must take a radically new approach to our production processes to dramatically increase the number of programmes we support at little or no resource cost and thereby free resource for projects of real ambition whether they are programme-related or native to the web. So this then is the new shape of Vision on bbc.co.uk." – *Simon Nelson, BBC Controller of Portfolio & Multimedia, speech to BBC Vision in-house Multiplatform Day*

REITH LAYING AT THE BBC

WHEN asked to comment on the cuts at the BBC caused by the £2bn hole in its finances following a less than expected licence-fee settlement, James Purnell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, declined. "The BBC is independent," he said. "It would be wrong of me to comment."

But he was happy to go on the record four weeks earlier at a Broadcasting Press Guild lunch: "I think the [licence fee] was a fair settlement for the BBC," he revealed. "£3.5bn is a lot of money [and will] enable the BBC to play a central role."

It would be quite wrong to suggest that his new found coyness had anything to do with distancing the government from redundancy plans, caused in part by its own interference with the corporation's affairs.

STAFF at the BBC's factual production centre will bear the brunt of the TV cuts – with a loss of 420 jobs and an 11 percent reduction in factual TV. Their fate was sealed by Project Jewell, a harsh review of in-house production conducted over the summer by Peter Salmon, who rejoices in the title of "chief creative officer" at BBC Vision.

Quite why Salmon was thought fit to review anything is something of a mystery, given that he was previously a notably lacklustre controller of BBC1. Even more surprising is the identity of his sidekicks who backed up his severe conclusions – Keith Scholey, deputy chief creative officer, and Anne Morrison, controller of network production.

It seems odd – and infuriating – to the soon-to-be-axed workforce that the two people directly responsible for the growing crisis in BBC factual programmes over the past five years seem to have escaped the chop. They are the woman who served as "controller of documentaries and contemporary factual" from 2001 to 2006, and the man who was "controller of factual production" from 2002 to 2006.

Who they? Step forward Anne Morrison and Keith Scholey.

MEANWHILE, just a week before the BBC cuts were announced, Peter Salmon and his boss Jana Bennett threw a champagne reception at the Victory Services Club in London's West End. What on earth could they be celebrating?

While BBC galley-slaves were preparing to receive their P45s, Salmon had decided to reward the faithful with an afternoon party and free bar for up to 100 executives, all at the expense of the licence payers. Grandly titled a "Creative Forum", the event was clearly a pat-on-the-back for top brass who had escaped the axe but would have to break the bad news to their underlings.

Apart from screening clips from forthcoming BBC shows, and interviewing some of the few London Factual programme makers who might survive the cull, Salmon also chose the occasion to big up his "Hot Shoes" initiative, which involves "sending employees on attachments to experience two weeks' working in a completely different area". To support this innovative scheme Salmon introduced a short film about a typical BBC employee experiencing life in a different area of BBC Vision. The employee in question was a certain Jana Bennett. Given her culpability in the "Crowngate" scandal, many BBC staff feel that a change of job for Bennett – perhaps to canteen-assistant – would indeed be richly deserved.

PS: Still no word from the BBC's editorial policy unit over a potential conflict of interest involving independent production company Juniper Communications, which is making a three-part film about Tony Blair and whose managing director, Richard Clemmow, is married to the Hot Shoe shuffling Jana Bennett. The unit's guidelines require that "the BBC should be satisfied that everyone involved in editorial decisions and programme making is free from inappropriate outside commitments". So everything must be tickety-boo.

ALTHOUGH BBC1 controller Peter Fincham, BBC press chief Jane Fletcher and RDF boss Stephen Lambert have all walked the plank over the great "royal huff" scandal, another executive has emerged unscathed. In the Wyatt report, published earlier this month, this figure is identified only as "the BBC executive producer" responsible for the series about the Queen.

On 3 May he met an executive producer from RDF, the independent production company, to discuss the series. "Recollections of this meeting differ," Wyatt notes. The RDF man says he showed the now-notorious clip of the Queen supposedly storming out. The BBC man insists that he didn't.

Nevertheless, the BBC man did write an excited memo to Fincham and other execs as soon as the meeting ended. "I think they have some AMAZING stuff..Sequences in the can include HMQ being provoked into a huge fit of pique by photographer Annie Leibovitz and storming out of room..."

Amazing indeed. So why didn't alarm bells ring in the BBC executive's head? As Wyatt observes: "Even if the sequence had been authentic, questions arise as to whether the material should have been released at this early stage, and whether the Palace knew and was happy that it was being included."

Before the scandal blew up the BBC was happy to acknowledge that the man in question was Martin Davidson (who is also the partner of BBC4 controller Janice Hadlow). Why is it now so coy? Perhaps it is just embarrassment at the fact that the BBC executive producer who was meant to be supervising RDF's work had only joined the BBC in 2005 – after spending the previous four years as head of history at... RDF Media!

2.00 Animal Park A 100-year-old tortoise fights for its life. With Ben Fogle. (R/S)

TV Guide

A NEW trail for BBC News showing various hacks around the globe filing copy using a BlackBerry has raised more than a little laughter in the newsroom.

The BBC banned the use of these devices following the embarrassing transmission of emails to the wrong recipients.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£200m Cost of BBC Scotland's new HQ, opened last month

200 Staff being sacked at BBC Scotland in current cost-cutting round

WHAT better day to bury bad news at the BBC than last Thursday, when all eyes were focused on Mark Thompson and his economy drive? Lo and behold, this was the very day chosen to announce the departure of Colin Hancock, editor of *The World At One* (aka "Hancock's Half Hour").

Laddish, football-crazy Hancock had been under a shadow all year as the BBC investigated complaints that he sexually harassed two young (female) broadcast assistants with suggestive emails and "inappropriate comments".

The "first phase" of the inquiry, which ended in July, found that there was "a case to answer". Although a staff union meeting then passed a motion demanding he be suspended until the next stage was completed, management decided he could stay in his job while it proceeded.

Quite why the inquiry was dragging on so long is a mystery, especially when compared with the few days it took the BBC to fire producers over the phone-in debacle.

Having procrastinated and prevaricated for ages, and upset the *World at One* team by refusing to suspend him, BBC bosses seized on last week's redundancy plans as the perfect opportunity to ease Hancock's passing with a fat pay-off. In a farewell email to colleagues last Thursday he denied that he was leaving because of the sexual allegations. No, he had been "thinking about the other things" he'd like to do in life... "and now seems a good time to start. I've therefore decided to take this opportunity to volunteer for redundancy during this period of restructuring in News. I think we've all learnt over the last few years that announcing you're leaving then hanging around for a while is a bit daft... so I've decided to leave today."

And, with that, he was gone.

THE proposed sale of Television Centre continues to baffle in-house production teams who still make BBC programmes there and the independent producers who also use TVC – despite dire warnings from managers that its facilities are conveniently "past it" and "too expensive to update".

The BBC says its £500m move to Manchester will provide the needed capacity. But the studios at the Salford development will not be owned by the BBC, which will have to use licence-payer money to pay for studio time.

One BBC programme maker points out: "There is not enough studio capacity in the south east to just shut TVC, but in five years' time there may be, as others will come into the market to fill a vacuum created by the BBC. The sad thing is the new studios won't be near shops or stations, audiences will be hard to find, and of course the profit will go outside of the BBC. The cost of shipping artists by plane up north will become the norm, perhaps added to the procurements taxi booking service."

The programme maker wonders how much of the licence fee is already going to other companies as profit. It's a good question.

BBC MANAGERS are determined to avoid any legal difficulties arising from their speedy redundancy process.

The delay in issuing notices, claimed as a victory by the unions, was simply due to the fact the Beeb discovered it had "a legal obligation to consult" them, even at the eleventh hour. Managers were forced to disclose the details of cuts at departmental meetings by reading word-for-word from statements cleared by lawyers. A reluctance to stray from the written brief led to frustration during questions from the floor.

The BBC is packaging these rapid redundancies under the spurious guise of being kind to staff facing "uncertainty". But, as managers well know, such haste will not sit well with industrial relations legislation.

BACKSTAGE at the BBC's refurbished Radio Theatre is a pokey stone staircase with grim whitewashed walls.

To celebrate returning there after several years in exile, *News Quiz* presenter Sandi Toksvig recently asked her panelists to sign their names on the backstage wall, so that over the years it would become a monument to all the people who had appeared on the show. They duly obliged.

Days later the *News Quiz* producer received a stern letter from something called BBC Heritage, which is officially responsible for "ensuring that key aspects of the BBC's past history are recorded and preserved in writing, pictures and through artefacts, so that the BBC and others can learn from the past".

It seems, however, that freelance attempts to record the BBC's heritage are not acceptable: attached to the letter was an invoice for £100 to cover the cost of re-whitewashing the wall.

GOING LIVE

BBC NEWS 24's coverage of the Rugby World Cup final was a poorly timed demonstration of how to waste licence-payers' money on trivia.

Not content with packages about rugby widows and wedding ceremonies that clashed with the match, reporters were sent to Waterloo station to provide live coverage of fans returning after the game.

"I'm depressed," said one fan. Collette immediately asked the killer follow-up: "How do you feel?"

AD NAUSEAM

IS RYANAIR the new French Connection (*Eyes passim*)? We only ask because once again the ASA has censured a Ryanair campaign – in this case an attack ad that accused online travel agents lastminute.com of being rip-off merchants.

Naturally, the ASA's report found that all four of Ryanair's charges against lastminute.com were either untrue, misleading, denigratory or a combination of all three. But by that point the ad had run across the national press, so in many minds the mud will have stuck.

It means that no fewer than 13 complaints against Ryanair's advertising have been upheld this year – time, surely, for the ASA to exercise the sole sanction that gives it any real potency and report Ryanair to the Office of Fair Trading?

LAST MONTH's news that two Police Community Support Officers did not attempt to rescue a drowning 10-year-old boy in Wigan broke at around the same time as an advertising campaign to recruit volunteer special constables to the Met.

The strapline on the adverts plastered all over London's tube system? "I didn't want to be somebody who stood by and did nothing."

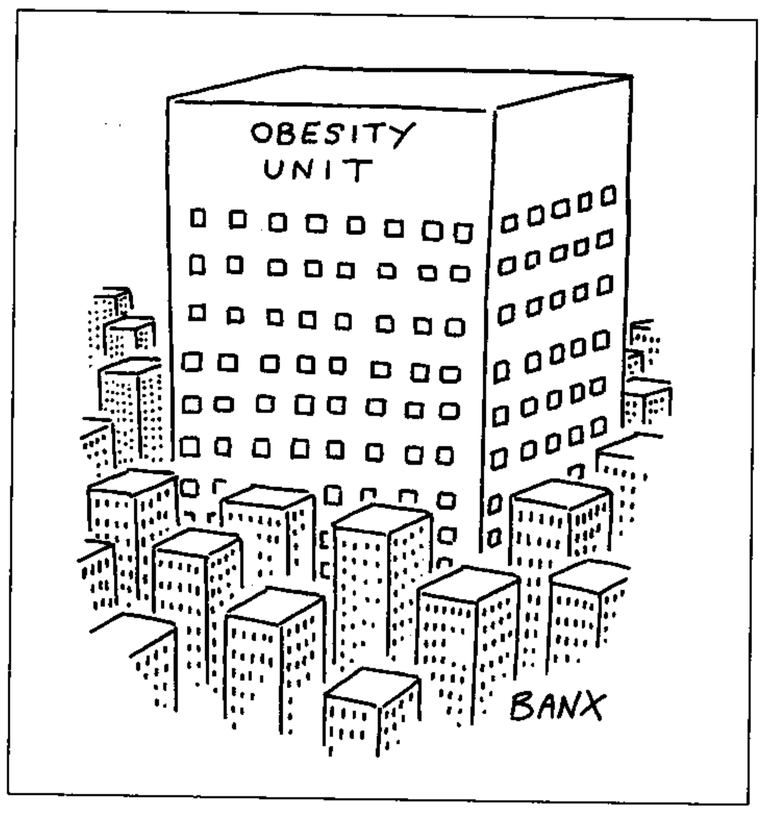
ROAD RAGE

JOINED-UP government action to tackle a predicted obesity epidemic, promised by Health Secretary Alan Johnson, can only go so far thanks to the treasury's sweet tooth for fuel tax revenues.

The Foresight report highlighted the link between being overweight and having a sedentary lifestyle. Travelling to and from work, shops, schools, hospitals and other places could of course entail much more exercise were it not for decades of government policies that actively encourage people to use cars.

Johnson said "modern transport systems" – ie cars – are at the heart of the dilemma that comfortable lifestyles make people fat. But the treasury has no such dilemma. It insists the benefits of any investment to improve public transport, walking or cycling must be weighed against the fuel tax that will be lost as a result of motorists driving less. That makes it much harder to justify sensible transport ideas; and Labour has already blocked tram schemes for Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Portsmouth which would have cut car traffic.

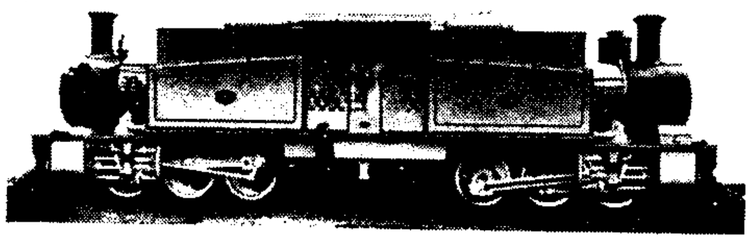
Encouraging people to walk more means discouraging them from driving on local journeys. Simply adjusting traffic-light phases to give cars less time and pedestrians more would have that effect, but that is unlikely to happen because nearly a quarter of car journeys are under two miles and a useful source of revenue which mustn't be jeopardised.



Labour's appraisal rules also stipulate that quicker journeys for motor vehicles must be calculated as a benefit, so any scheme that would retard motorists is even harder to justify.

In the long run the treasury could of course be quids in if people were weaned off car-dependency and lost weight, so the cost of treating their obesity didn't rise to the predicted £45bn a year by 2050. Alas, the treasury doesn't take the long view.

'Hedgehog'



SIGNAL FAILURES

A Crossrail to bear

THE saga of Crossrail, the east-west London railway announced by Gordon Brown, shows how the government can squander billions in the name of "prudence".

In the early to mid 1990s, the Tories and Labour were convinced that a tunnel was needed between Paddington and Liverpool Street linking railways west and east of the capital. Crossrail would improve connections with other transport and relieve packed tube trains. The problem? No one wanted to pay for it.

In 1994 a committee of MPs took the short view and rejected a private Crossrail bill because they were worried that commuter numbers had fallen due to the early 1990s recession. They were also unsure how the £2bn for infrastructure and new trains would be raised.

Fast forward to 2000 and the folly of rejecting Crossrail was obvious. London's transport was bursting at the seams once more and Crossrail's expected cost had risen to £3.5bn. What had Labour learned? Nothing. Its 10-year transport plan in July 2000 simply said Crossrail "is assumed to be financed by the private sector".

Labour then spent years trying to cajole the private sector to cough up. The principle that companies which will benefit from better transport should help fund the investment is established in France, where tram systems have been built with temporary business taxes. But the UK treasury hates local levies which it can't control. So when Brown announced his Crossrail breakthrough, he simply dumped the scheme on to Transport for London where the mayor will take the flak for a proposed levy on all but the smallest London businesses.

The difference now is that Crossrail is expected to cost £16bn. Private-sector contributions will come nowhere near that, so taxpayers will have to pay more than £5bn and the rest will have to be borrowed by TfL and Network Rail – all because £2bn was deemed too much for taxpayers to pay for the entire scheme in the mid 1990s and £3.5bn was deemed too much in 2000. Such is the cost of "prudent" short-termism.

'Dr B Ching'

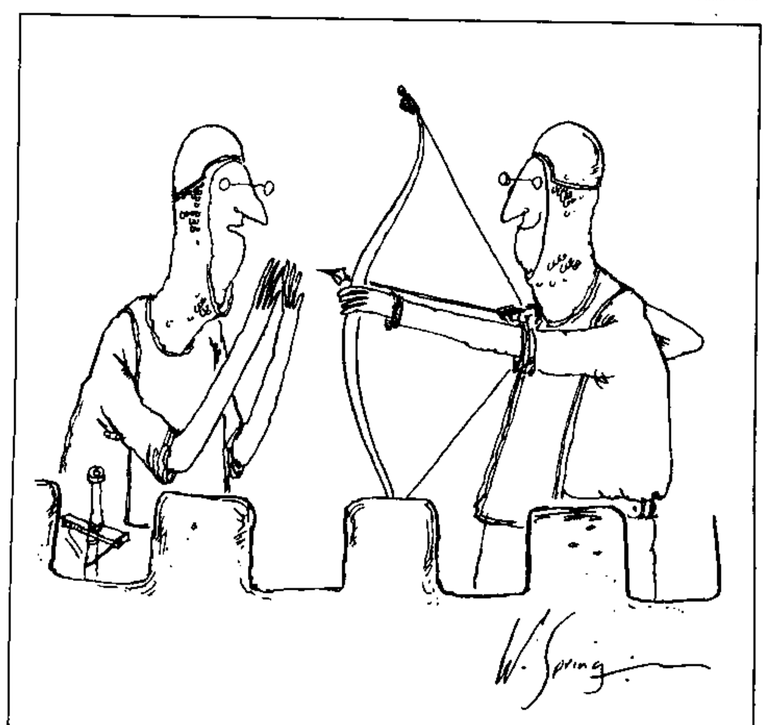
CADBURY: PURE DAIRY HUMBUG

"RIGHT from the beginning the Cadbury [brothers] wanted to be a 'force for good in a troubled world'... 'an asset to the neighbourhood', and they put their money where their mouths were," Todd Stitzer, chief executive of Cadbury Schweppes, told the Institute of Directors last year.

"We still passionately believe that it is possible to pursue commercial goals and behave in line with values."

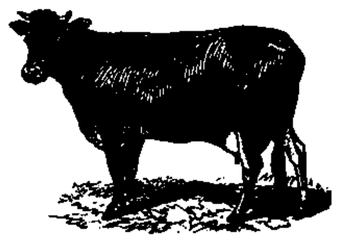
Cadbury's pursuit of commercial goals saw the company announce this month that 700 jobs in the UK are to be cut as operations move to Poland for the sake of "greater supply chain efficiency" (and bigger profits).

The confectionery factory in Keynsham, near Bristol, is to close by 2010. The sale of the site is likely to see the disappearance of the playing fields and social club which provided leisure for four generations of chocolate workers and the local community. So much for Cadbury family values.



"For God's sake, be careful! You'll have someone's eye out!"

Down on the Farm



WHEN those who rule us go off their heads, it is often the tiny detail rather than the big picture which brings home just how far into the realms of lunacy they have travelled. So it is with Defra's response to bluetongue, the latest plague to be inflicted on our farm animals.

Having reduced much of our livestock industry to paralysis by declaring a vast tract of eastern England a "surveillance zone", out of which it is illegal for animals to be moved, Defra then comes up with its recommendations as to how farmers can help prevent the disease from spreading.

The bluetongue virus is not infectious from animal to animal but is carried by small insects such as midges. Defra's solution is that the farmers should deploy "large sticky nets to trap the potentially infected midges". Furthermore, they should impose a curfew on all their animals, to ensure they are kept under cover when "midges are at their most active – usually the late afternoon and early evening".

So here is Defra's brilliant master plan: that every afternoon the farmer should round up all his animals and keep them safely tucked up indoors until the Midge Menace has receded. As for those "sticky nets", as one bluntly-spoken Cornish dairy farmer, Pat Bird, delicately enquires, how are they going to be suspended – "from every bloody tree from Lincolnshire through Leicestershire down to Suffolk?" Or, since bluetongue is raging across large parts of continental Europe, is Defra suggesting that nets should be hung all down the eastern coast of England, to prevent the midges gaining access to these shores?

The worst problem for farmers within the 150-kilometre surveillance zone (set up under EU rules) is that they can only move their animals within the zone. And here they are caught up by one of the government's earlier blunders: the mass-closure of our slaughterhouses pushed through by John Gummer when he was agriculture minister in the 1990s. No part of the country lost more abattoirs than that now within the bluetongue zone, so that most of its farmers have long been forced to send their animals for slaughter to abattoirs on the other side of the country. This is no longer possible. Normally some 8,000 cattle a week from within the zone are killed to provide supermarkets and butchers with beef. But the few remaining abattoirs within the zone can only process around 2,500 a week, leaving a fast-rising deficit of animals which can no longer be slaughtered. When a deputation of livestock auctioneers recently went to Defra to explain the problem, they were presented by officials with a list of slaughterhouses inside the zone, many of which had been closed for years. So the supermarket shelves pile up with ever more imported meat, leaving British farmers to pay for the upkeep of animals they can no longer sell. With the prospect that these restrictions may remain in place at least until next summer, one remedy many have been crying out for is a programme of vaccination, of the kind used to keep bluetongue under control in countries outside the EU. But with their atavistic horror of vaccination, the Defra officials insist the right vaccines are not yet available. Work on developing them was being carried out at Pirbright by Merial. But since the escape of FMD virus from Pirbright, all that research has been suspended until Defra gets its house in order. And for that, all evidence suggests, we may have to wait a very long time.

'Muckspreader'

Let's get away
Active F, 68, slim build, fit, likes walks, bowling & holidays. Seeks n/s M to share the good things in life. Beds.

Saga magazine

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SNEER MISS

NEWHAM mayor Sir Robin Wales was quick to call for the resignation of Simeon Ademolake, a councillor for the tiny Christian People's Alliance party, after he was convicted of assaulting two police officers in August.

Ademolake's prosecution came about after bailiffs and six police visited his home to recover an unpaid parking fine. A struggle ensued when the bailiffs attempted to seize a laptop from Cllr Ademolake's wife, who was still in her nightclothes, having already impounded the councillor's car, worth £2,000, in settlement of a debt of £400.

In a sneering set-piece council Q&A on 17 September, Wales was asked by Labour's James Butler if the mayor could "guarantee the safety" of staff and councillors in Cllr Ademolake's presence. Wales replied that he did not know "what would set Cllr Ademolake off", but "was convinced that the press, public and members can be protected".

Then, earlier this month, Cllr Ademolake won an appeal against his conviction. No police witness turned up and the CPS claimed it had "lost" the file. Cllr Ademolake walked away, the judge said, "without a stain on his character". Knacker's non-attendance avoided officers having to answer questions about why Ademolake's wife's digital camera had been confiscated in the course of the struggle and its contents deleted. Not, surely, because it contained evidence that would have cast doubt on the police version of events?

Mayor Wales has now had two weeks to apologise for his sneers against Cllr Ademolake, but has remained silent. No doubt he will make amends at the next council meeting on 29 October.

● TWO YEARS ago *Eye* 1143 first wrote about Mayor Wales's obsession with turning Newham's parks "constabulary" into a "private police force". We told how one allegation against the management of the parks constabulary, examined by the council's former head of legal, Amanda Kelly, was that it was racist. After the Kelly report, which recommended a thorough overhaul of the constabulary's management, Wales declared it was time to "move on". Alas, the parks constabulary remains as dysfunctional as ever. Its most senior officer, "Inspector" Michelle Bacon, has been forced to take a quiet "early retirement" after an investigation by a (genuine) senior police officer found that she had been, er, racially abusing her underlings. Meanwhile, Newham's Keystone Kops have taken delivery of their eagerly-awaited long-handled batons (*Eye* 1183), although they are still not allowed out on the streets with them because the council has not resolved the slight problem of it being an offence for members of the public – which is all the Keystones are – to carry offensive weapons. In the meantime they are being asked to sign disclaimers so that if they use their batons to beat the shit out of a hapless litterbug, the council will not be liable.

HANTS, PANTS

THE IMAGE of Hampshire as a county where dim, complacent Tory councillors let smartarse officers run the show has not been allayed by the debacle of the new chief executive's appointment.

Eye 1195 told how Andrew Smith, currently "director of property, business and regulatory services", got the £199,000-a-year top job despite a district auditor's report on how he and two other senior officers had illegally awarded work worth £1.2m to seven IT consultants without putting it out to tender, as the council's own and EU rules require.

One consultant, Bill Newman, hired as programme director of the "Hants Direct" call centre project, is trousering £413,939 for the period June 2005 to March 2008 at rates of up to £900 a day. Newman was involved in the selection of the other six highly-paid consultants, who by an amazing coincidence all came from the same agency as him – Commerce Partners.

The district auditor's report was not made public until after Smith's appointment was made. It has now emerged that four of the seven councillors who sat on the cross-party panel which appointed Smith had not actually bothered to read it. And the backbench councillors who rubber-stamped his appointment? They weren't even told it existed until after their votes were in. Doh!

THAT'S ALL WHITE, THEN

MORE THAN a year after the departure of Swansea chief executive Tim Thorogood – who resigned after wangling planning permission for a "garage" that was actually a bungalow (*Eye* 1152) – the council is counting the costs of another cock-up on his watch.

An employment tribunal hearing has just concluded in Cardiff, at which former council officer Julie Jones claimed unfair dismissal. The tribunal heard how Mrs Jones, whose role was to investigate complaints against Swansea's social services department, was unhappy when her job was merged with the general council complaints department, part of Thorogood's "corporate vision". She claimed she was bullied by her new manager, Alison White, but knew she would never get a fair hearing if she complained because of Mrs White's "inappropriate" relationship with former council leader Lawrence Bailey.

Mrs White told the tribunal she had not had an affair with Bailey. Before the tribunal began Cllr Bailey was arrested by Dai Knacker after council IT staff discovered thousands of pornographic images on his laptop. As the porn was of the adult, hetero variety, Knacker lost interest although Bailey,

who has since resigned, still has to account for its presence to the council watchdog, the Adjudication Panel for Wales. It emerged near the end of the tribunal that some of the saucy images on Bailey's computer featured, er, Alison White, the woman he wasn't having an affair with and who had, in earlier evidence, denied that her picture was on his laptop. Whoops! The tribunal is expected to take several weeks to deliver a judgment.

BOUND AND GAGGED

WHEN North Lincs district council transferred 10,000 homes to a new "registered social landlord", North Lincolnshire Homes (NLH), it was given five seats on the 15-strong board. But when two of the councillors on the board raised questions about how money was being spent, they were gagged by NLH.

Cllrs Tony Ellerby and Linda Cawsey asked in a local paper why it had been necessary for some board members and senior staff to be holed up for two days in a plush hotel for what NLH described as "vital training and development" costing £2,234. They also wanted to know why all 237 employees had gone on a "staff conference", which entailed taking them on a day out to Doncaster's Keepmoat [*sic*] stadium at a cost of £17,000.

Ellerby and Cawsey believed it was their duty to bring this to the attention of the public, but NLH was having none of it. They were told to keep their mouths shut, as was a third councillor on the board, Len Foster.

It's normal for councils with representatives on other bodies, such as police or fire authorities, to ask those councillors to "report back" from time to time. But when Cllr Foster prepared to answer councillors' questions about what was going on at NLH, which has £118m of public money to spend over the next five years, he was handed a letter from NLH warning him that he, too, was gagged.

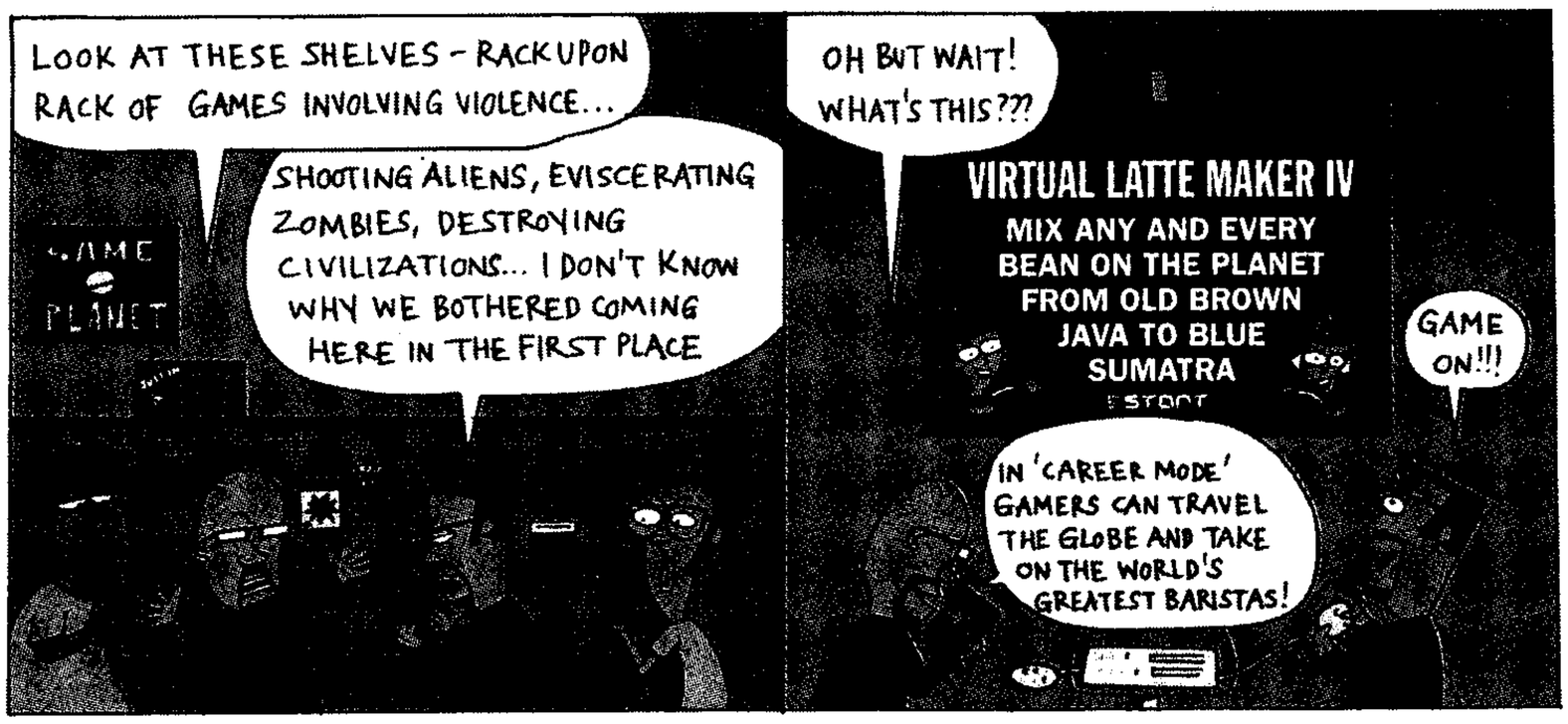
NLH's PR firm, IPB Communications, told the *Eye*: "North Lincolnshire council has a right to nominate five individuals to the board... These nominees are required by law to promote the success of North Lincolnshire Homes. Their role is not to act as the council's guardians or to report on progress to the council."

Democracy? What was that?

● POWYS county council's decision to ditch its bus contracts and opt for a new multi-million deal with French multinational Veolia prompted uproar among local coach drivers. The council spends £7.5m a year on school and college transport, which had kept a number of small local operators going. Earlier this year they staged a mass protest of buses in the council HQ's car park in Llandrindod Wells. Brecon bus firm owner Gwyn Williams said his company would lose 80 percent of its business: "We are a third-generation company that's been working with the local authority for 52 years." The furore has clearly proved too much for the council's transport unit manager, Tony Goodman, who was at the heart of the negotiations which ended in Veolia getting the contract. He has found himself a new job – as general manager with, er, Veolia!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

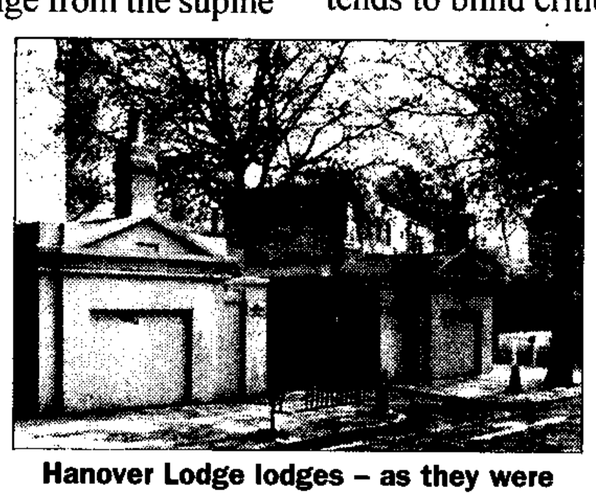

LOOK AT THESE SHELVES - RACK UPON RACK OF GAMES INVOLVING VIOLENCE...
SHOOTING ALIENS, EVISCERATING ZOMBIES, DESTROYING CIVILIZATIONS... I DON'T KNOW WHY WE BOTHERED COMING HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE
OH BUT WAIT! WHAT'S THIS???
VIRTUAL LATTE MAKER IV
MIX ANY AND EVERY BEAN ON THE PLANET FROM OLD BROWN JAVA TO BLUE SUMATRA
GAME ON!!!
IN 'CAREER MODE' GAMERS CAN TRAVEL THE GLOBE AND TAKE ON THE WORLD'S GREATEST BARISTAS!

NOOKS and CORNERS

AN ARCHITECT and contractor have at last been properly fined under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 for illegally demolishing two grade II listed buildings: in this case, the lodges to Hanover Lodge in Park Road, Regent's Park.

The vandalism occurred during refurbishment of Hanover Lodge itself, the Regency villa designed by Decimus Burton for John Nash which is now leased from the Crown Estate by the Lord Bagri, the Conservative peer who is chairman of the metal trader, Metdist Ltd.

Hooray for Westminster city council for taking the case to court: it makes a change from the supine behaviour of, say, Runnymede district council, which did nothing when David Beadle illegally demolished "Greenside", the listed 1930s house by Wentworth Golf Course in Surrey (see *Eyes* 1074 & 1095). And at least the law now allows for a serious fine – £25,000 from the architect and £20,000 from the contractor, Walter Lilly & Co Ltd – when compared with, say, the derisory £300 demanded from the egregious Sir Bruno Welby after he destroyed the listed 17th century Denton Almshouses back in 1980.



Hanover Lodge lodges – as they were

But the real pleasure of the case is that the careless architect is none other than that tweedy darling of traditionalists, Quinlan Terry, who believes that not only are the Classical orders divinely inspired but also that he himself is God's gift to architecture. Last year Roger Scruton could describe him as "our greatest living architect" (not much competition, it must be said), while David Watkin can claim that Terry is "the single most distinguished and prolific architect at work in the classical tradition in either Britain or the United States". This was written in his book, *Radical Classicism: The Architecture of Quinlan Terry*, published (by the Americans, Rizzoli) last year, to which none other than the Prince of Wales contributed a foreword.

Terry is certainly prolific. He has a successful business designing neo-Georgian and neo-Palladian mansions for American millionaires and was responsible for the residence of our own dear Barclay Brothers, owners of the *Daily Telegraph*, in the Channel Islands.

It might seem strange that Quinlan Terry could have been responsible for destroying listed structures by such distinguished architects as John Nash and/or Decimus Burton, but – unlike other traditional or Classical architects in Britain – he has never shown much interest in or respect for historic buildings (look what he did to the interior of the mediaeval church of St Helen Bishopsgate). In his messianic fervour for Classicism, he is, in fact, as insensitive and as arrogant as any modernist.

Terry claims that the breaches of listed building law were "purely administrative rather than malicious" and that, as the lodges were in poor condition, "the law is an ass". In fact, after Walter Lilly & Co had been at work, only the rear walls of both structures were left standing. What went were not only the roofs but the front elevations by the road – handsome, austere abstracted Classical compositions.

Quinlan Terry belongs to the photocopy school of Classicism and cannot leave anything out. His buildings are larded with pediments, columns, swags, urns, balustrades and the rest, culled from Georgian and Palladian pattern books, all of which tends to blind critics to the fact that the designs are not radical at all but turgid, derivative and pedestrian.

While modernists hate Quinlan Terry's buildings on principle, for the likes of the Prince of Wales and other admirers blinded by ideology he can do no wrong. But style should be immaterial: what is important about Quinlan Terry's architecture is that it is inept and vulgar – all about detail and exhibiting no understanding of Classical architecture as a language. There are a dozen modern Classical architects who can do (a bit) better, while John Nash, in a mere gate lodge, puts Terry's whole plutocratic *oeuvre* to shame.

It is only a pity that while Westminster stands up for two tiny gate lodges, the council is prepared to allow the demolition of a great swathe of decent architecture – listed and unlisted – opposite Victoria Station (see *Eye* 1179). But that's another story.

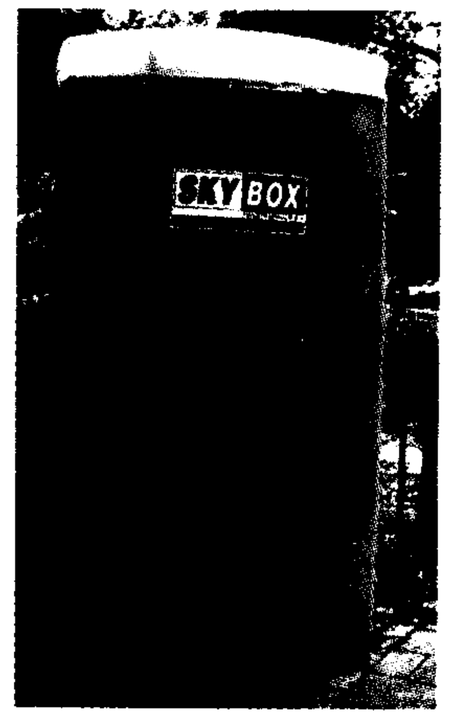
AND THEN there is the Regent Palace Hotel, just off Piccadilly Circus. Until a couple of years ago it provided reasonably priced accommodation for hundreds of foreign tourists – surely a benefit to London. But now the greedy Crown Commissioners want to take it upmarket.

An earlier scheme for total demolition was thrown out. But now there is a scheme by Dixon Jones which is almost as bad as it envisages the demolition of all of the faience-clad facades apart from the corners, although some of the more important public spaces will be kept – including the spectacular bars by Oliver Bernard (father of the late Jeffrey).

Fortunately the Regent Palace Hotel is now listed, so when the contractor started stripping out the interior before planning permission had been granted, SAVE Britain's Heritage chivvied Westminster city council to stop the work.

Will Westminster grant planning permission for the destruction of this fine and useful building? What's the point of going to court over two tiny lodges if a huge listed building like the Regent Palace Hotel can be mutilated with impunity?

'Piloti'



I-SPY

Holland

Submitted by Malcolm Mort.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE classical record industry has been in trouble for years, shuffling ever closer to the abyss and discarding artists, standards and principles along the way in an attempt to sell discs to a reluctant public.

The brink got closer recently when the European commission approved the merger of Sony with BMG, a juggernaut alliance that leaves 80 percent of the world's CD production in the hands of just four companies (the others being Universal, EMI and Warner).

Smaller independent labels are reduced to less than marginal status – one reason they have been challenging the merger since it was announced in 2004. While they take risks with challenging releases, struggling by on tiny margins, the big companies coast on film scores, crossovers and endlessly repackaged re-releases of Maria Callas.

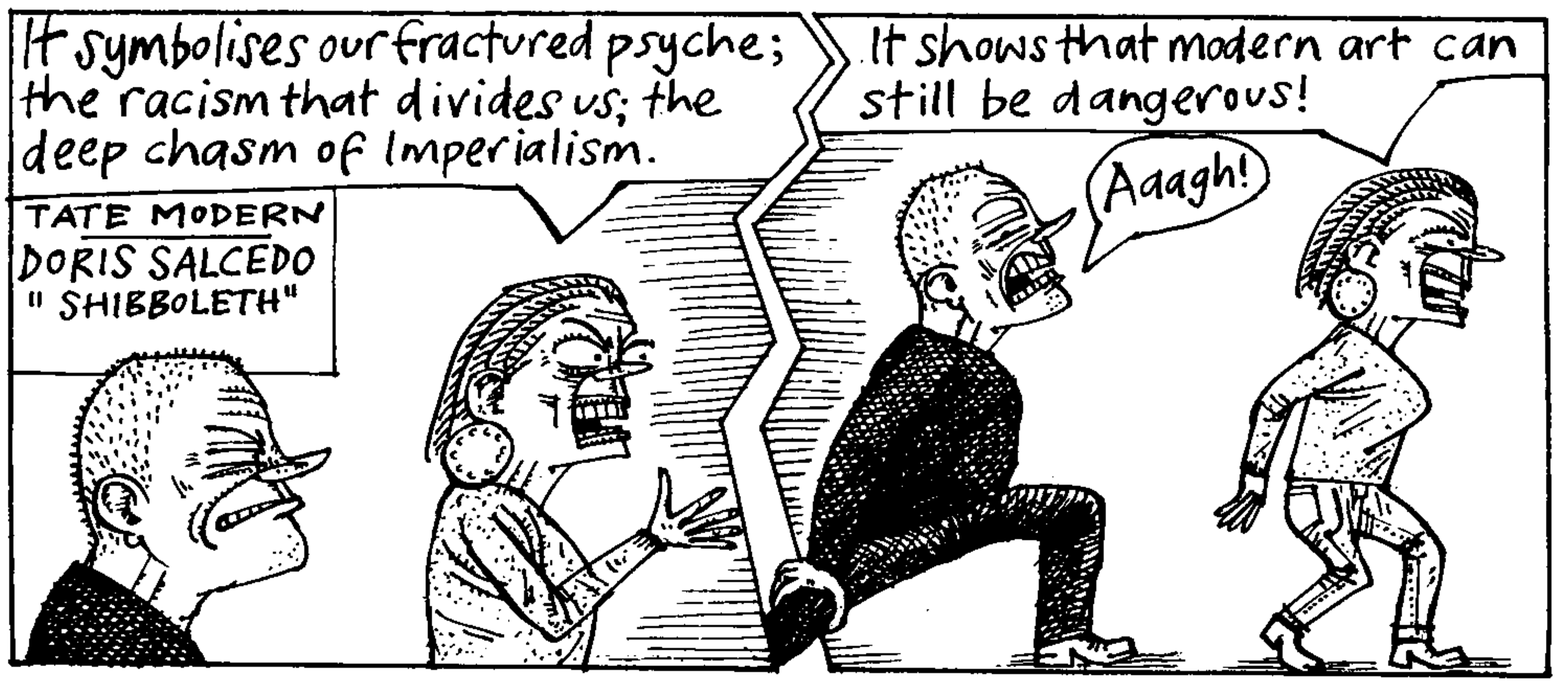
The larger the big companies get, the more their sagging values rule the market. They control the main UK trade body, the British Phonographic Institute, which owns and runs the chief marketing platform for classical CDs, the Classical Brit Awards. No surprise, then, that the Classical Brits concentrate on film scores and the glossy crossover releases of the major companies. Independents have the Gramophone Awards, but these reach a tiny audience and have no real clout in the world market.

So how and why did the commission conclude that the Sony-BMG merger would be in the public interest? The independents are lobbying the EU ombudsman for an investigation and considering a formal appeal. But their prospects aren't great. The mighty have triumphed and crossover rules, OK.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


It symbolises our fractured psyche; the racism that divides us; the deep chasm of Imperialism.
TATE MODERN
DORIS SALCEDO
" SHIBBOLETH"
It shows that modern art can still be dangerous!
Aaagh!

OBN

Perhaps the brightest spot in government anywhere these days is Britain's new Foreign Secretary, David Miliband. So, it was fun to watch him with his wife on Sunday night. She is a professional violinist. They are one of the most accomplished couples I know. And they wear it so well. Understatement is, of course, a cultural trait if not a mandatory characteristic for the British. Nevertheless, they seem so unaffected, and so normal.

JAMES RUBIN
Evening Standard Magazine

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

Letters

A Bourn winner

Sir,

It's all over the media – expenses going through the roof for meals and flights. And where were you? Oops, sorry – you were there at least six months ago.

Don't you ever get pissed off that "real journalists" suddenly pick up on a story you've been publicising for ages? Of course you do – silly question.

Sorry, can't think of any reason to cancel my subscription.

Cheers,
IAN McROBERT,

Via email.

Eye foretold you so

Sir,

Re Northern Rock and the financial problems. If you refer to Eye 1160 (Yes I know, I'm a slow reader here in the sun, partly thanks to my mail arrangements) In The City last two paragraphs on page 31 [re City hacks' lack of understanding or scrutiny of what the financial masters of the universe are up to] you seem to have foretold the present situation!

Regards,
ROGER HARRIS,

British Virgin Islands (open to offers!).

Lookalike

Putin

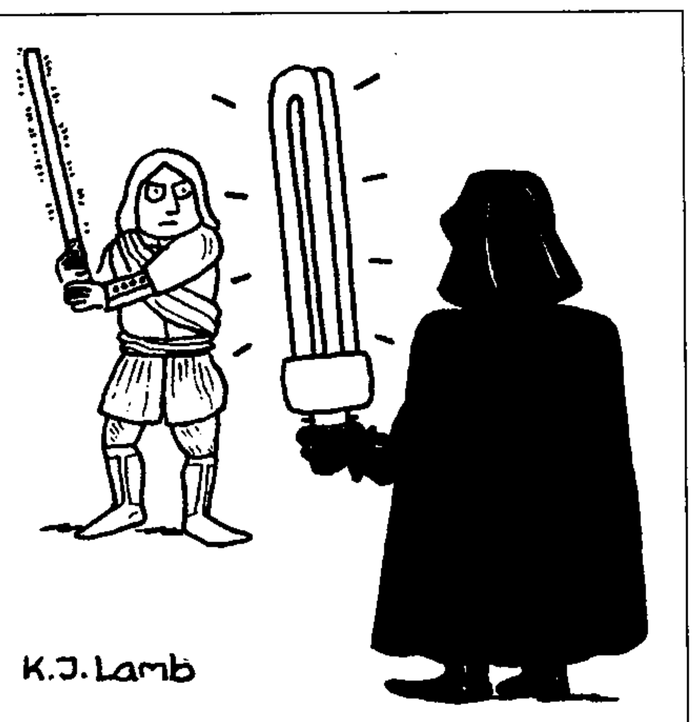
Kronsteen

Sir,

From Russia with Love – has anyone noticed the resemblance between Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, and Vladek Sheybal as Kronsteen, boss of the former KGB assassination agency SMERSH? Could they by any chance share some DNA? I think we should be told.

John Rushby-Smith,

Via email.



Dave Vader and his energy-saving lightsabre

Quod erat remonstrandum

Magister,

Although your Latin citations (exempli gratia Oculo MCLXXXXIV) successfully defy linguistic theory by conveying semantic content by means of vocabulary alone, I do feel that a little actual grammar (beyond a stochastic scattering of accusatives) might lend a modicum of authenticity and enable you to take better advantage of your syntax exemption.

Omnes collaboratores amicosque Oculi salutat.

Cornelius Pedanticus Liverpudliensis alias
ROBERT TAUBMAN,

Emskirchen, Germany.

Not bitter, then

Sir,

Shirley Porter to write her autobiography (Eye 1194) – that one will win 1st prize in any "you must have made that up" competition!

If the loathed Dame does pay some poor ghost writer to pen a very few words in justification of her appalling record as leader of Westminster City Council, then I hope she will spend some time telling us how she really feels about the suicide of Dr Michael Dutt, the ruining of the health and careers of professional local government employees, never mind the decent Tory politicians who were shat on the moment she did not get her own way.

Stupidly I got sucked into the web and paid for it with the end of my political career and a breakdown which nearly killed me. Did I get one word of sympathy from this awful woman? Did I hell! Correction: six years later when I was in court proving successfully that I was innocent, while she got done for £13m, she casually asked me "how I was getting on". I replied in the vernacular with two words associated with "sex and travel"!

The best thing Mrs Porter could do now is to pack her bags and take her remaining trillions off to some tax haven, preferably on the other side of the world, and leave us all in peace. If she is stupid enough to put pen to paper, then would any news editor who is interested, please take a note of my email address and I will be happy to tell them at the appropriate time exactly how this viper orchestrated the biggest cock-up in local government in this country.

Yours etc,
PETER HARTLEY,

peter.hartley@yahoo.co.uk

●*The writer was a Conservative councillor in Westminster in the 1980s and chairman of housing at the time of Dame Shirley's "homes for votes" scandal. Ed.*

Tied up in Notts

Sir,

While I would not normally go out of my way to defend mediocre Saturday evening light entertainment, Remote Controller's characterisation of Robin Hood as an anti-war vehicle is somewhat stretched.

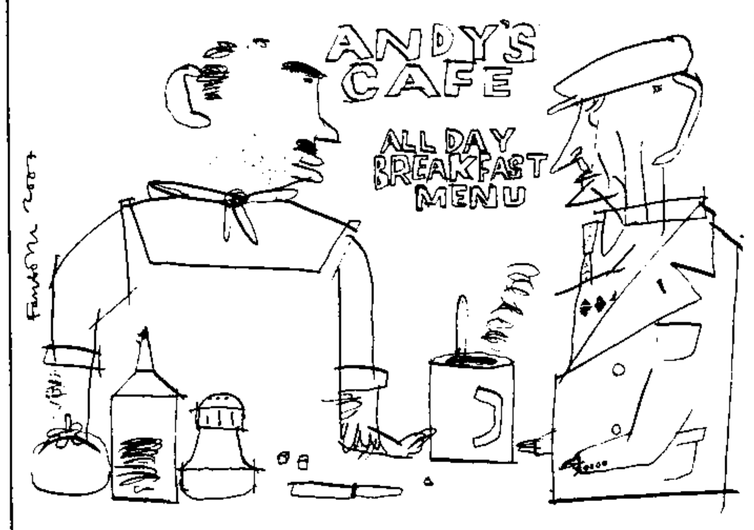
In keeping with the traditional story, Hood is loyal to the crusading King rather than "a political opponent to the war". Is Allen's Sheriff "obviously Dick Cheney"? Again his motivations and allegiances defy the metaphor. As for being a "rip-off of Doctor Who", the similarities are striking by their absence.

Maybe Remote Controller would do well to avoid a genre he obviously does not watch. What next? Offerings on the latest England game from your editor?

Your faithfully,
MICHAEL HALMA,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"... or there's my signature dish – egg, bacon, fried bread, mushroom, beans, sausage, tomato and chips"

Dr Who are you kidding?

Sir,

Remote Controller (Robin Hood, Eye 1195) observes well enough on the political absurdities, but also calls the new series a rip-off from Dr Who, citing Keith Allen's bearded sneering portrayal of the Sheriff as a latterday Master.

But does he not remember the Sheriff in the "Richard Greene" version of Robin Hood? Roger Delgado's Master was excellent, but no more than a copy of the magnificent Alan Wheatley's wonderfully sneering bearded Sheriff. (Just Google for yourselves – it will do your nostalgia cells good.)

I wonder, could there be some time-lord link between the shows? I think we should be told.

Yours,
GRAHAM SMITH,

Via email.

Not in his name

Sir,

I slightly resented Remote Controller's implication that the antiwar movement is limited to the smug middle classes living in Islington "with a Not in My Name sticker on the window". I didn't realise that pacifism was a class issue, but then what do I know – I'm too busy sipping fairtrade coffee and ordering my next delivery of organic vegetables.

JOHN NUGENT,

Via email.

"We've saved a fortune since Ken started doing all our dentistry"

"Flippin' kids..."

SOLUTIONS

"At Macfarlane Group, we're passionate about providing total packaging solutions" – *cardboard boxes*

"JHC Laundry Operations: Managed Laundry Solutions" - *launderettes*

"Barceloneta Animal Control Solutions" – *company which rounds up stray cats and dogs and throws them off bridges, Puerto Rico*

All submitted by readers

Photo opportunity

Sir,

In the latest edition of the BBC's "This Week" a certain gentleman presenter muses whether it is "better to be old and wise rather than young and hip". As this is an important issue in today's world, I think it would be of great benefit to your readers if you were to illustrate the dilemma with a picture.

Yours faithfully,
CLOE FRIBOURG,

Via email.

Platform heels

Sir,

I expect you will be besieged by anorak clad correspondents, whose double "0" status was awarded by Hornby rather than MI5, pointing out that the construction snafu at the new Shepherd's Bush station is that the western platform, that is the northbound, platform is 18 inches too narrow across the platform rather too short along its length. It could of course be that the curse of Wembley Stadium has struck again – the Australian company Multiplex being responsible for both projects.

http://londonconnections.blogspot.com/2007/10/shepherds-bush-platform-debacle.html provides all the details – as you can see – hardly room to swing a zimmer frame.

PS: She who must be humoured is buying me a new anorak for Christmas.

BOB ROBINSON BSc, FCA,
Tarleton, Lancashire.

Horn blower

Sir,

I agree wholeheartedly with your correspondents Amos Miller and Michael Boyle ("Baton charge", Letters, 1195). On the other hand, just to be the devil's advocate, I would suggest that three of the greatest maestri of the previous century – Toscanini, Reiner and Szell (none German and the latter two of Austro-Hungarian origin) were also the worst tyrants, as live recordings of Toscanini's rehearsals will bear witness.

Regarding Reiner, apparently a double-bass player in the Chicago Symphony once complained about the maestro's notoriously small beat. At the next rehearsal, so the story goes, the unfortunate bass player came armed with a telescope, which he trained on Reiner's podium on which a small note was pinned saying "You're fired!"

As an orchestral musician – at least here in Germany with powerful unions – after 15 years of service it's pretty difficult to get yourself fired, the main grounds being a) murder (even if it's the conductor); b) getting caught with your hand in the till; c) calling in sick and getting caught "depping" with another orchestra; d) falling off your chair in a drunken stupor.

Greetings to the English colleagues who don't have it as cushy as we do in Germany.

Yours etc,
GUY JOHNSTON (ENGLISH FRENCH HORNPLAYER IN GERMANY!),

Kirchhundem, Germany.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He [Wayne Rooney] is inexperienced, but he's experienced in terms of what he's been through."

STEVE McCLAREN, Radio 5 Live
(Tony Bateman)

"The city is calm. But very, very tense..."

BBC TV reporter in Rangoon
('Ingo')

"Andrew Flintoff is to see a renowned joint specialist in Amsterdam."

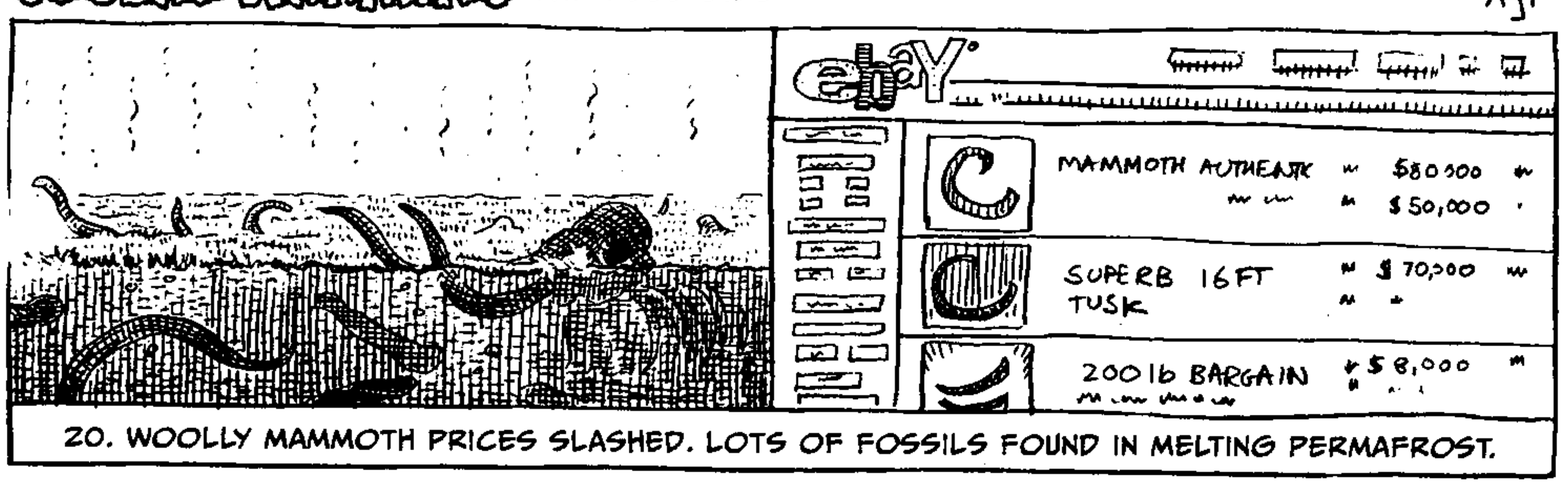
Newsreader, Radio 5 Live
(Adrian Lightly)

"Adam Crozier is throwing things into the fire to upset the applecart."

Royal Mail striker, BBC Radio 4
(Keith Ridland)

"At the end of the day, we're going home tomorrow..."

New Zealand studio guest, ITV
(Ed Knight)



"We've got to keep up with the Joneses' alcohol intake"

Pedants cornered

Sir,

Please don't include tedious pedantic corrections like this on your letters page. The chances are that such corrections will themselves need correcting. Thus in Eye 1195, Edward Whitehouse attributes responsibility for the term "benefit crystallisation event" to HM Revenue & Customs. He is mistaken. The term originates in the 2004 Finance Act, and was therefore penned by a lawyer in the office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

Your faithful reader,
PETER STOKES,

Via email.

King makers?

Sir,

Careful now – are you getting soft in your old age?

Your review of the Oona King Diaries (Literary Review, Eye 1195) almost said something nice about an author of your choice. What next? Will you actually start recommending *something for Eye readers to look at? What is the world coming to?*

Yours, deeply disturbed,
BRYN GLOVER,

Cracoe, North Yorkshire

Pooling resources

Sir,

On page 9 of Eye 1195 it is reported that a charity is raising £5m to £8m for a physiotherapy pool at Headley Court. I was a patient there 50 years ago and there was a perfectly good physiotherapy pool there then.

Yours faithfully,
J.L. NUNN (WG CDR RAF, RETD)

Hambledon, Hants.

Eye, you, ME

● *Thank you for all the letters about ME triggered by M.D.'s praise for Dr Esther Crawley's service for children with ME (Eye 1190). Most correspondents believe ME is not synonymous with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, most agree that it is a genetically linked disease of the immune system that is still poorly understood and poorly treated. Although graded activity programmes work for some people, it can make others worse. An even greater problem seems to be getting an accurate diagnosis in the first place, made harder by the lack of specialists and specific diagnostic tests. R. Jones highlighted the plight of sufferers who have been involuntarily committed to psychiatric hospitals and so have no control over the treatment to which they are subjected. The tragic story of Sophia Mirza can be read at www.investinme.org. MD is now moving on from ME, but plenty of good advice can be found at the Action for ME website www.afme.org.uk.*

Letter from **Astana**

from Our Own Correspondent

WELCOME to our remote new capital, a city as subtly understated as Las Vegas and with all the architectural diversity of Pyongyang.

It has been 10 years since the capital was moved from the sleepy backwater of Almaty to this former Soviet outpost – and what a difference it has made! As shiny buildings tower over the endless expanse of steppe and fleets of even shinier Mercedes grace our roads, we can rejoice in Astana as the symbol of a new and vibrant Kazakhstan and the embodiment of our glorious leader, Nursultan Nazarbaev.

It is all about finding modern forms to stay in touch with our past. The Central Asian Khans of old set standards we admire. In fact, we like Nazarbaev so much that in elections last August his party won a ringing 100 percent of the seats in parliament. We do have a new law that limits future presidents to a maximum of two five-year terms, but patriots rejoice that it will not apply to Nazarabaev himself.

There are some people of course who don't like how we do things. Early last year, one of our main opposition leaders, Altynbek Sarsenbaev, was found dead in his car outside Almaty with a bullet in his head and his hands tied behind his back. The alleged perpetrators, including a senior member of the senate and a rogue intelligence officer, were caught and sentenced and the case quickly closed.

Young Kazakhs understand well enough the wisdom of staying out of opposition politics; so the brightest go into business instead. It is surprising to report, therefore, that the biggest challenge for Papa, as we like to call him, actually comes from within his own family.

This spring, the boss dispatched his son-in-law, Rakhat Aliev, to Vienna after he was accused of kidnapping two senior officials of the family-owned bank Nurbank. Aliev, a sugar impresario who until recently was married to Papa's eldest daughter, Dariga, has now broken ranks with Nazarbaev Inc and become an outspoken critic of the regime. This is not good news for Dariga who, having been touted as her father's successor, has lost both her husband and her seat in parliament.

After he was arrested briefly in Vienna while having his hair done, Aliev may be tempted to move to the UK, where his arch-enemy, former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, resides. This irritates our leader, who otherwise has a soft spot for Britain.

Indeed, we are delighted to have Kazakh banks listed on the London Stock Exchange, including one of our largest, Halyk, which is owned jointly by one of Papa's other daughters, Dinara, and her tycoon husband Timur Kulibaev, and has the former Lord Mayor of London, Sir Gavyn Arthur, on its board. It was a proud moment for Nazarbaev last November when he opened up the day's trading at LSE with Mr Kulibaev and other dignitaries at his side.

Kazakhstan is very keen on corporate transparency and that is why we appointed another trusty Brit, Sir Richard Evans, to chair our new state holding company, Samruk. We are confident that Sir Richard can apply the same ethical standards to Samruk that he introduced during his long and illustrious tenure at BAE Systems. Certainly President Nazarbaev, who joined forces with BAE to create a new national airline, Air Astana, has full confidence in Sir Richard's ability to tackle corruption and teach Kazakhs how to conduct business the proper way.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Jesus was a man who advocated the rule of law," Humphrey Odanga told the Kenyan High Court in Nairobi, "yet he is repeatedly depicted as a criminal, even in the Bible. The crux of our case is that the arrest, torture, and punishment of Jesus was unlawful, and amounted to a violation of his human rights. Furthermore, crucifixion was a wrongful punishment for a trial based on charges of 'blaspheming the Holy Spirit,' for which the correct penalty was public stoning. We do not want to worship a convicted criminal, so we ask the court to declare Jesus Christ's conviction null and void, and his crucifixion illegal. Jesus was innocent."

Odanga was speaking on behalf of Friends of Jesus, a group of wealthy Kenyan businessmen and lawyers who had brought the case. High Court spokesperson Dola Indindis agreed that the appellants "have a right in court, because the issues raised touch on human rights, and the High Court has unlimited powers in that area." But when Lady Justice Joyce Aluoch asked where the respondents were, lawyers for FOJ admitted that papers had not yet been served on Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Caiphas, or King Herod.

Outside the court, legal opinion was divided. Some lawyers argued that FOJ's petition was legitimate, but others said that "Kenyan courts do not have jurisdiction, because the 'course-of-action' did not arise within its jurisdiction. They should have filed it in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which has the mandate to hear the case." *(Daily Nation [Kenya], 31/8/07. Spotter: Dr Simon Fordham)*

– ● –

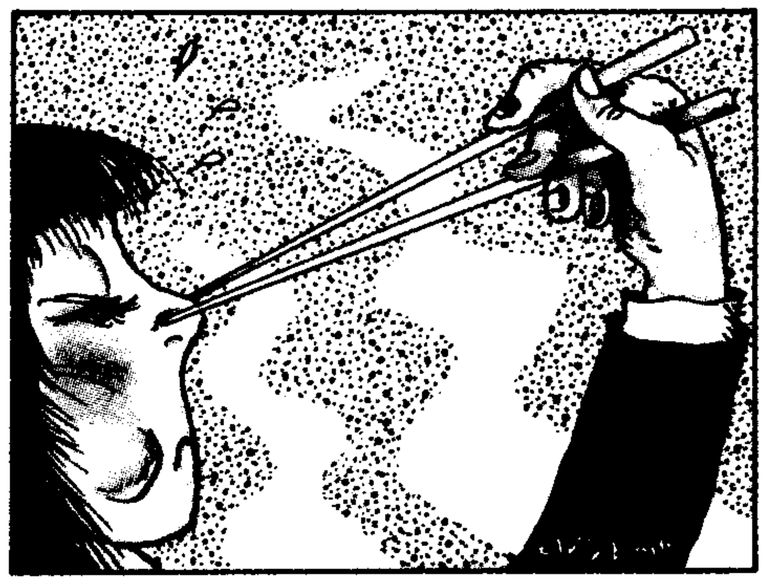
● *"I began getting stiff joints about seven years ago," Eric McKaig told reporters in Stamford, "so I visited an orthopaedic surgeon, who X-rayed me, and told me my knees were crumbling. I'm a golf maniac, but soon I could barely walk around the course or swing a club, and painkillers didn't work. Then a friend who'd had a similar problem told me he'd found a cure, and after some persuasion, he admitted to me that he'd been spraying WD-40 onto his joints. It sounded odd, but I was desperate, so I took the plunge and sprayed it on both knees before rubbing it in, and it's been an absolute Godsend for me. Now I can even run around the garden with my grandchildren, and I hadn't been able to do that for years."*

A spokesman for the manufacturers of WD-40 lubricant said, "The spray has thousands of uses, but treating stiff joints is definitely not one of them. The product has not been designed for use on the human body and has not been medically tested. If you are suffering from joint pain, seek advice from your GP." But McKaig's partner, Isobel Reading, said "the effects have been amazing. It's not a cure, it's a prevention, but it appears to be working, so who cares?" (Rutland & Stamford Mercury, 24/8/07. Spotter: Peter Owen)

– ● –

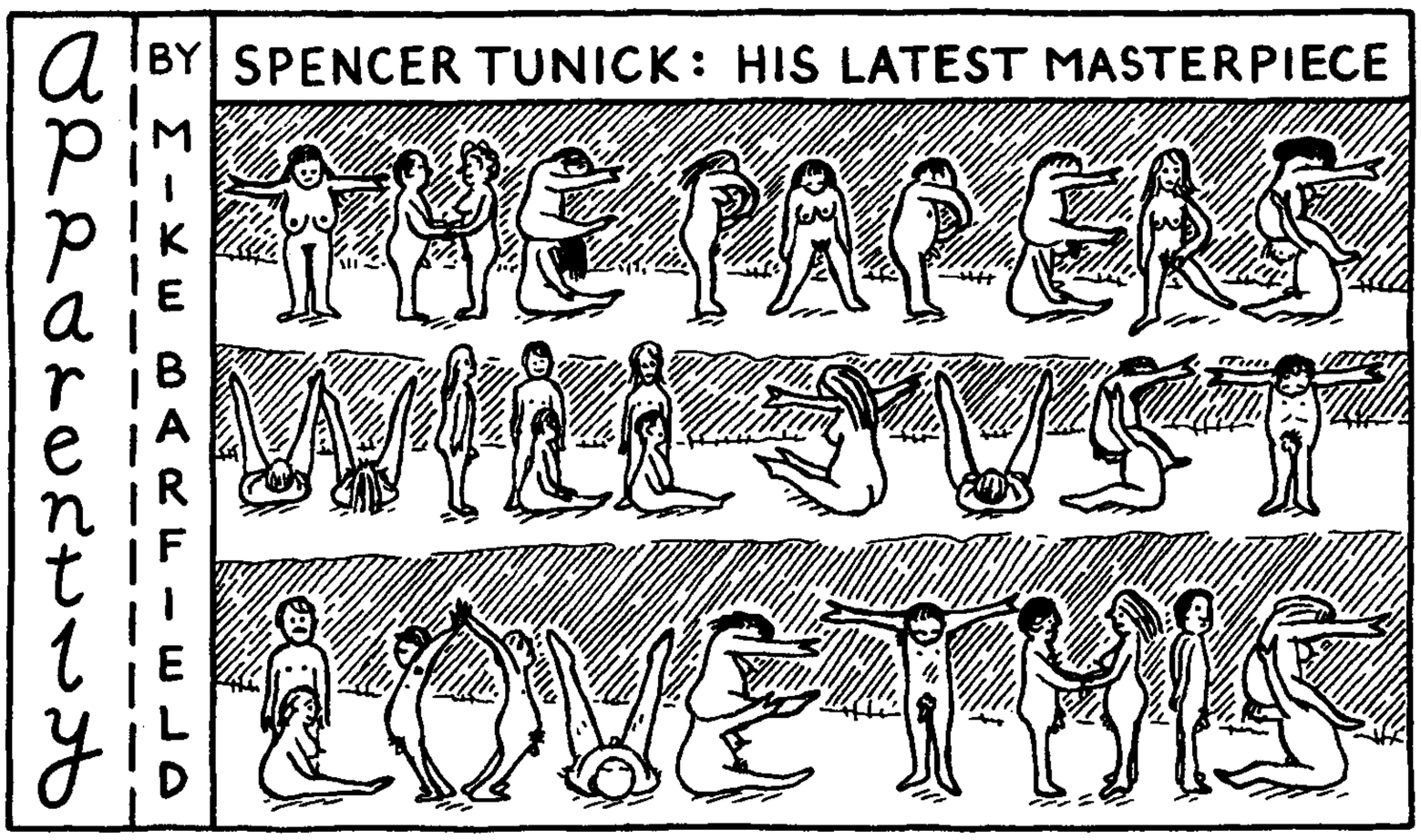
● "Who wants to eat stinky tofu that does not stink?" Peng Tien-jung asked environment inspectors as they tested the stench levels outside his Kuang Tou Lao stinky tofu restaurant in Hsinchuang, Taipei. "The more aromatic it is, the better the quality, everyone knows that. My customers love it, and say it's the best in Taiwan, so why am I being fined for creating too much stink?"

Peng was protesting against the T$100,000 fine imposed on his restaurant by the Taipei County Environmental Protection Bureau, after



his stinky tofu reached a stench level of 30, in an area where the maximum permitted level of air pollution is 10. Some of his neighbours sympathised with him, while others backed the fine, with one school student telling the TVBS cable channel that "his stinky tofu really stinks very bad. If you ride in a bus through our neighbourhood, you can even smell the stink from inside the bus. It makes me want to vomit."

According to TVBS, the Kuang Tou Lao is not the smelliest stinky tofu restaurant in Taipei. That accolade goes to an unnamed stinky tofu street vendor, who rubs a type of dirty gravel onto his tofu to make it more pungent. *(Taipei Times, 5/9/07. Spotter: Timothy York)*



gtv From Lord Greed, Chairman of GTV

NO ONE is more distressed than I over the revelations of phone-line fraud concerning Mr Antwell Dec and Mr Declan Ant.

Let me make it clear that whatever is alleged to have happened happened long before I became chairman of Gnome TV. And, even if it didn't, I knew nothing whatsoever about the so-called events at any time.

As is well documented, I have a policy of zero tolerance for people who say I should resign. Or those who suggest that I should reprimand either Mr Decwell Ant or Mr Antlan Dec, whose courtesy titles of Executive Producer in no way implied that they had anything to do with the television entertainment programme bearing their name and starring themselves.

May I reassure everyone that lessons have now been learned and it is unnecessary either to sack any staff or for the police to be involved.

I take full responsibility for none of this. It is all someone else's fault. That, after all, is the motto of the Greed family – "The Big Bucks Stop here."

LORD GREED,
GTV, Cigar House,
Red Brace Road, London

Radio 3

Italian opera

'I detti di Pavarotti'
(sponsored by Northern Rock)

First chance to hear Puccini's long-forgotten opera in which the two wives of a famous opera singer argue over his fortune only to find that he left £12 million of debt. They then fight over who should *not* inherit the debt in the now famous aria, "Your enormous bank account is frozen".

THOSE BBC MEASURES IN FULL

- ☐ Loss of 2,000 jobs in TV Production
- ☐ Creation of 4,000 senior management posts to facilitate the loss of those 2,000 jobs.
- ☐ Er...
- ☐ That's it.

"Well, it looks like we've no choice... we'll have to cut the programmes"

NEW-LOOK BBC

BEFORE

- ☐ BBC 1,2,3,4
- ☐ Radio 1,2,3,4, 1 Extra, 5 Live, 6 Music, BBC7, Asian Network
- ☐ BBC Symphony Orchestra
- ☐ BBC local radio

AFTER

- ☐ 'F*** me, I'm fat' on BBC3

"We've messed up our figures for the licence fee"

"So let's cut all the bits of the BBC..."

"...that justify having one!"

A Nobel Prize-Winning Cabbie writes

EVERY week a well-known taxi driver is asked to comment on an issue of topical importance.

This week: **James 'Jimmy' Watson** (cab no. 7782567) on the intelligence quotient of persons of African origin.

Listen guv I've got nothing against the blacks per se but it's obvious isn't it? They're just not as intelligent as us whites, are they? I mean, you've only got to look at the state of Africa. They're all starving to death, dying of AIDS or murdering each other... where's the intelligence there, I ask you? I mean, how many black people have won the Nobel Prize? Yet white blokes win it every year. You tell me, guv, what's the connection, eh? Stands to reason, dunnit? I had that Nelson Mandela in the back of the cab once. Very stupid man. You did say Luton airport, didn't you guv? Oh no, I'm halfway to Gatwick. Never mind, I'll only charge you double...

NEXT WEEK: Jimmy Watson on why people like him should apologise or be strung up.

Harry Potter And The Closet Of Secrets

***by J.K. Rowling** (rewritten by Peter Tatchell to make it more sexually explicit)*

DUMBLEBORE got off the Hogwarts Express early at Clapham Common and moved towards the ill-lit copse in the far corner.

A voice came magically from behind a bush.

"Hello, wizard! Is that a wand in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?"

Bumblebore dropped his copy of Time Out's pink guide to London and *(cont. p. 94)*

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

GORDON BROWN'S SCHOOLDAYS...
OH NO, IT'S THE PUBLIC SCHOOL BULLIES!
SHOW SOME BOTTLE YOU COWARD!
ALL RIGHT I'M BOTTLING IT!
I'M GOING TO GIVE GORDON A DAMN GOOD THRASHING!
YIKES!!
WE CAUGHT THE ROTTER STEALING ALL OUR IDEAS
INHERIT THIS — THWACK!!
OH NO! I'VE MADE A CLUNKING FIST OF THINGS!!
BLUB!
I'M SEEING STARS, READERS!

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 7

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

It is my sad duty to announce the emergence of elements within the innermost circle of the Party which are threatening to sabotage everything we have already achieved in building the Age of Change.

Who are they, these wreckers and saboteurs whom it is the highest duty of every loyal Party member to root out and destroy?

BLAIRITE RUNNING DOG GANG OF FOUR

They are none less than the allies of the discredited former leader, who have been assiduously attempting to undermine your Leader in fanning the dead embers of Blairite-Mandelsonism.

Let us name these reactionary forces who wish to take us back to the dark days of the personality cult which was built up around the former leader and his greedy, moneygrubbing spouse Madam Blair.

First among them is the hated, corpulent aristocrat, the self-styled 'Lord Falconer', only elevated from obscurity by his corrupt, cronyist friendship with former Comrade Blair.

Next on the list of traitors is the snivelling lickspittle Byers, who singlehandedly destroyed our country's once-glorious railway system and then discredited the entire regime of the former leader by his shameless mendacity before the People's Courts.

Then the searchlight of infamy must focus on the pitiful figure of the one-time Trotskyite renegade Milburn, who pathetically deserted his post, allegedly to "spend more time with his family", a traditional formula employed to disguise incompetence, failure and mental breakdown.

Finally we direct our gaze at the shameless manoeuvrings and traitorous utterances of the obese former Party functionary Clarke, whose bunglings in the time when he presided over the Ministry for Internal Security made him a laughing stock throughout the entire world.

Such is the measure of the pack of mangy, flea-ridden neo-Blairite running dogs yapping at the heels of your Supreme Leader and his new cadre of young Miliband-Ballsists as they march shoulder to shoulder towards the radiant vision of the Age of Change.

But these scurvy mongrels yap in vain.

Your Supreme Leader is too busy with his higher endeavours and his comprehensive plans for modernising every aspect of our nation's life even to notice these contemptible shadows from his discredited past.

And what is the first of these noble aims upon which your Leader has been tirelessly focusing his efforts night and day?

It is of course the overriding need to ratify the new Treaty of Peace and Friendship with our European allies, the so-called Merkel-Sarkozy Pact of Eternal Co-Operation, designed to take us further on the road to building an independent Britain free to control its own destiny free from any interference in the sovereignty of the British masses.

This is why I have embarked on the brave and lonely road of agreeing to everything that our dear allies have proposed.

Let us remember the immortal words of wisdom enshrined in the Little Brown Book: "When is a Constitution not a Constitution? It is when the Supreme Leader has decreed it to be so, in accordance with the wishes of the People which only he can know." *(The Thoughts of Comrade Brown, in the Chapter entitled 'The Basic Error of Referendumist Thinking', page 831.)*

In answer to those dupes of Thatcherite Murdochian-UKIPism who accuse the Supreme Leader of a "breach of trust" after promising a People's Plebiscite, let me point out this so-called "pledge" was given by the disgraced former Leader, and, like every other of his utterances while he was in office, it has now been exposed as a barefaced lie.

Since I have now been chosen unanimously to express the will of the entire British people, such exercises in pseudo-democratic populism are mere futile charades unworthy of the Age of Change.

Yours fraternally,

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

A MESSAGE TO PARTY DELEGATES IN THE WESTMINSTER SOVIET

COMRADE DELEGATES!

I must warn you that there has been serious backsliding in the conduct of delegates during the Leader's speeches to the Supreme Soviet.

Supportive silence and prudent lack of applause are no longer sufficient to reflect the undying loyalty of Party cadres who have been sent to Westminster to demonstrate the solidarity of the people in their support for the Supreme Leader and the Age of Change.

Whilst not wishing in any way to return to the bad old days of the personality cult built up around the mentally unbalanced former leader, delegates are instructed to comply with the following amended procedures:

1. Whenever the Supreme Leader opens his mouth, delegates must express their appreciation by cheering wildly and waving their Little Brown Books.

2. Whenever the Supreme Leader makes a humorous sally at the expense of Cameronite-Osbornism, delegates should laugh uncontrollably, clutch their sides and fall off their benches in spontaneous and genuine admiration.

3. If anyone should dare to interrupt the Supreme Leader he or she must be howled into silence with concerted cries of "Fascist-Revisionist-Old-Etonianist Twit!"

Only this way can we preserve the true principles of People's Democracy in the Age of Change.

Signed by Comrade Ed Balls on his own initiative and in no way at the suggestion of the Supreme Leader.

IN THE COURTS

'I Saw Flashing Light In Death Tunnel' Claims French Witness

Inquest into the death of the late Diana, Princess of Wales (Day 94). The case was heard by Mr Justice Scott-Carrot, with Mr Michael Hugefee QC acting for Mr Mohamed al Fugger.

Scott-Carrot: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I hope you all, like me, enjoyed our agreeable mini-break together in the romantic city of Paris. You may think, may you not, that, with its leafy boulevards, delightful pavement cafes and world-famous Eiffel Tower, there could be no more perfect place to spend the weekend. But, if such be your conclusion, I must ask you to put it from your minds, as it has no bearing on the issues of the case before you.

I must ask you instead to sit back, relax and enjoy this video of our next witness, Monsieur Jean-Jacques Lunie, who cannot unfortunately be present with us to give his evidence in person but has sent us this message from his top-security ward in the Clinique des Imbeciles, Limoges.

M. Lunie *(on video)*: Bonsoir Votre Honneur, et aussi bonsoir à mon vieux ami M. Fugger.

Fugger: Get on with the fuggin' murder and the fuggin' James Bond style laser cannon!!

Scott-Carrot: Mr Hugefee, I must ask you to restrain your client.

Hugefee: My Lord, may I just consult my notes... *(Hugefee counts out notes in wad of used tenners given to him by Mr Fugger)* My client Mr Fugger has no further interjections to offer during the video.

Scott-Carrot: May we now please continue with the video device?

M. Lunie: Imaginez le scene, si vous voulez, quel horreur! Moi dans ma petit voiture, et, voila, c'est la fameuse princesse Anglaise, clairement pregnant par son mari M. Dodi Fugger, dans un Mercedes. Et, soudainment, qu'est-ce que c'est? Une flash de lumiere enorme, comme un bombe atomique. Sacre bleu, j'ai dit à moi-même. C'est le Duc de Edinburgh et ses amis de MI6, ou mon nom n'est pas Jean-Jacques Lunie!

(Mr Fugger here lets out a loud cheer)

Fugger: What did I fuggin' tell you, Your Fuggin' Honour!

M. Lunie *(still talking animatedly on the video while men in white coats attempt to take him away)*: I 'ave not feeneeshed yet. Il faut que je tell you about le monstre de Loch Ness, qui etait aussi dans le tunnel avec son ami M. Darth Vader.

(Here the video went blank)

Scott-Carrot: Well, we have had a very emotional morning, have we not? I must ask you now to say nothing of what you have heard today, even when you read about it in tomorrow's newspaper.

And now might be an ideal moment to adjourn for luncheon, though I have to say that the Garrick Club may not quite rise to the incomparable culinary standards of Le Petit Jardin des Gourmets in the Rue de la Princess Morte, where we all had such an agreeable dinner at the expense of the taxpayer last Tuesday evening.

(The case continues)

That Carter-Ruck Gorbals Bill In Full

P. CARTER-FUCK AND PARTNERS

Commissioners of Oaths and Purveyors of Fine Libel Writs to the Gentry

To: The Taxpayers of Great Britain on Behalf of the Rt. Hon. Michael 'Mick' McGorbals, Speaker of the House of Commons.

To: answering telephone call from Mr McGorbals complaining that the "entire" press was out to get him.
£2,331.11p

To: answering another telephone call from Mr McGorbals asking whether we had seen the Daily Mail today, containing an article by a Mr Quentin Letts headed "Useless Gorbals Hits New Low".
£1,512.62p

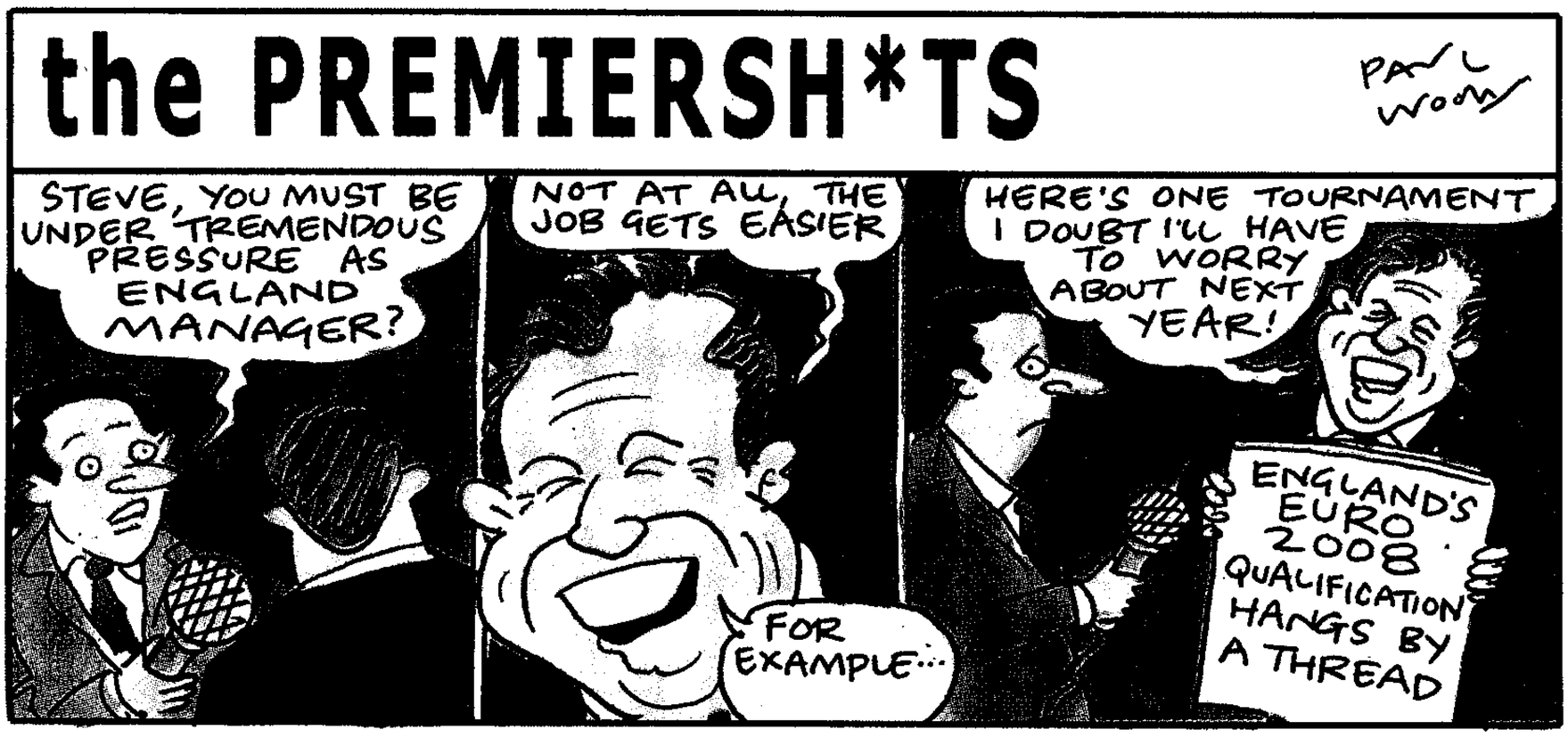
To: senior partner's time, logged at 4 minutes, 12 seconds, with Mr McGorbals in respect of the above article.
£2,214.24p

To: telephone call by senior partner to the House of Commons Budgetary Committee to confirm that this bill would be paid in full out of public funds and receiving assurances to that effect.
£1,462.21p

To: stationery, computers, photocopying, chocolate Hob-nobs and other consumables.
£15,864.22p

Shall we say a total of **£23,664.71p**?

An early settlement of this account would be appreciated. Failure to pay within seven days will result in a financial penalty of not less than £35,000 and/or action being taken under the principle of *habeas argentum pro-solicitorensis*.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOM
STEVE, YOU MUST BE UNDER TREMENDOUS PRESSURE AS ENGLAND MANAGER?
NOT AT ALL, THE JOB GETS EASIER
FOR EXAMPLE...
HERE'S ONE TOURNAMENT I DOUBT I'LL HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT NEXT YEAR!
ENGLAND'S EURO 2008 QUALIFICATION HANGS BY A THREAD

That Blair US Charity Dinner Menu in full

War on Terrine
Brown Trouser Soup

– ❋ –

Iraq of Lamb with Rehashed Cold Potatoes
Rumsfeld Steak with Warm Onger Sauce
(No Peas in Our Time)
Duck

– ❋ –

Condoleezza Rice Pudding
Trifle Over-The-Top
H-Bomb Surprise

– ❋ –

Selection of Cheese-Eating Surrender Monkeys with Completely Crackers

– ❋ –

TO DRINK:
Bin Laden Ends from the Cave of Tora-Bora
Nuits St Georges Bush

Ticketholders only: $2,000 per head. Tanks at 12.30 a.m.

ENGLAND'S SPORTING TRIUMPH

GLENDA SLAGG
THE GAL WHO KEEPS TRY-ING!?!!

YES, they're scrummy!?! The England Rugger Team I'm talkin' about, Mister!?! OK – so they didn't win the World Cup!?!! Who cares?!? Just look at them thighs!?! Mmm!! Fancy a *ruck* round at my place!?!! Or maybe a rolling *maul*?!!? Geddit!!? There's plenty of room for all fifteen of you in Glenda's boudoir!?!! And don't forget to bring your tackle!!?! (Geddit?!)

JONNYWilkinson!!?! Aren't-cha NOT sick of him!!?! Of course you're not!!?! This handsome hunk with the thunderous thighs is a sex-machine on studs!?! No wonder all the gals in Britain want to grab him round the waist and pull him to the floor!!?! Lie back and think of England, Jonny!!?!? (Geddit??!?) Mmmmm!!? You won't have any problem scoring with Glenda!!?!!

MARK CUETO!??! Was his leg over!?!! It certainly would be if he came round here!!?! And the rest of the team while we're about it!!?!?

JONNY Wilkinson!!?! ***(You've done this one. Ed.)*** **OK – Phil Vickery!?!! Grrrr!?! There's nothing Vicary about this 19-stone beefcake (geddit?!??) who is 110% macho man!?!! Drop goal!?!! Drop trousers, more like!?!! *(This is really terrible. Keep going. Ed.)* Take me into the Sin Bin with you, Big Boy – along with all the rest!!?!**

■ *HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's World Cup Rugby Romeos!?!*

● **Lewis Hamilton.** Vrooom!!? OK, so you didn't come first!?! That's the way I like it!!?!

● **Ronnie O'Sullivan.** I've got a tip for your cue – bring it round to my place and we'll pot a few balls together!?!!?

● **Nicolas Sarkozy.** Now you're free, Monsieur Le President, let's have an entente cordiale chez Glenda!!?! Ooh-la-la!!? It's ever sa-cosy chez moi!!?! Ged eet!!?!!

Byeeee!!!

Prof. TERRY EAGLESPART,
Reader in Marxist semiotics at the University of Manchester (formerly the World of Sofas, Moss Side)

Once again, totally predictably, the sickening literary military-industrial complex in the persona of the bougeois, homophobic ant-Semitic dynasty of Kingsley and Martin Amis have come out in their true colours as Fascist, anti-Semitic Islamophobes, and, er, er...

● *The full four-hour version of Professor Eaglespart's lecture can be downloaded as a podcast from www.drearyspart.manu.ac.uk*

Guardian Media Jobs

Assistant Dossier Compiler (Dodgy) On The Observer Newspaper

Can you fit into an experienced news team, coming up with intelligence dossiers for the Government? Candidates should have a thin grasp of foreign affairs and a solid relationship with Alastair Campbell.
(That's enough jobs. Ed.)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Alan Coren, Writer, Editor, Broadcaster and Wit

So. Farewell
Then Alan
Coren,
Star of Radio
Four's *News Quiz*.

"This must be
The one about
The parrot."

Yes, that
Was your
Catchphrase.

Now you are
In the news
Will you
Be a
Question this
Week?

E.J. Thribb
(17½ points to Alan)

"I'll have whatever she's not having..."

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters *to the Editor*

The Origin of Red Lines

SIR – How dare Gordon Brown employ the phrase "Red Lines" to describe his pusillanimous surrender to Herr Hitler and his French quislings. Those of us who fought and died in the Napoleonic Wars remember only too well where this phrase originated. It was not in the corridors of Brussels, but on the field of battle where British soldiers formed "a thin red line" against the assorted Fuzzy-wuzzies, Zulus, Frogs and Hun.
Sir Herbert Gusset,
c/o The Red Lion,
Balon-on-Thames.

SIR – Now that the European Treaty is ratified, I expect our Prime Minister will tell us about the "Brown Lines" that he has drawn to protect British sovereignty.
Mike Giggler,
Via email.

ELDERLY CHINAMAN 'LEFT TO DIE'

Shocking tale of abuse of the old

by Our NHS Staff **M.R.S .A. Bugg**

AGE CONCERN yesterday highlighted the appalling case of an elderly patient who was left to die with no help from those around him.

Mr Ming, 86, had been going downhill rapidly but his feeble appeals for help were callously ignored by his professional carers.

Lib Dementia

Some youthful members of staff even went so far as to poke fun at him in his final hours, joking that he was a 2,000-year-old Chinese emperor who had lost his army.

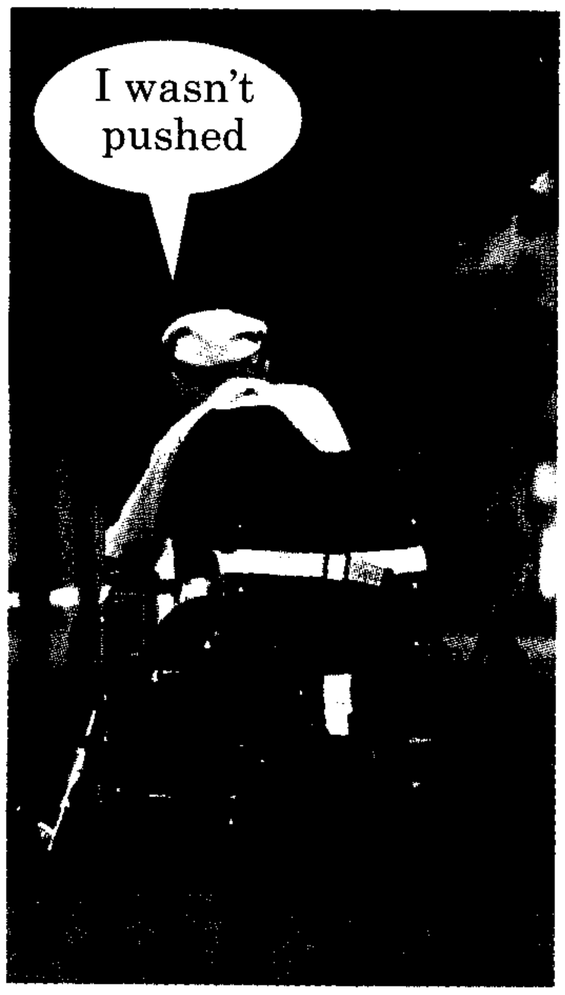
When Ming was found dead last week, one of his colleagues said "It was entirely Ming's decision. He had always made it clear that he would choose the time when we would turn off his life support system."

Another close colleague said "Ming always wanted to go with dignity. Any suggestion that we had somehow killed him off is as appalling as it is true."

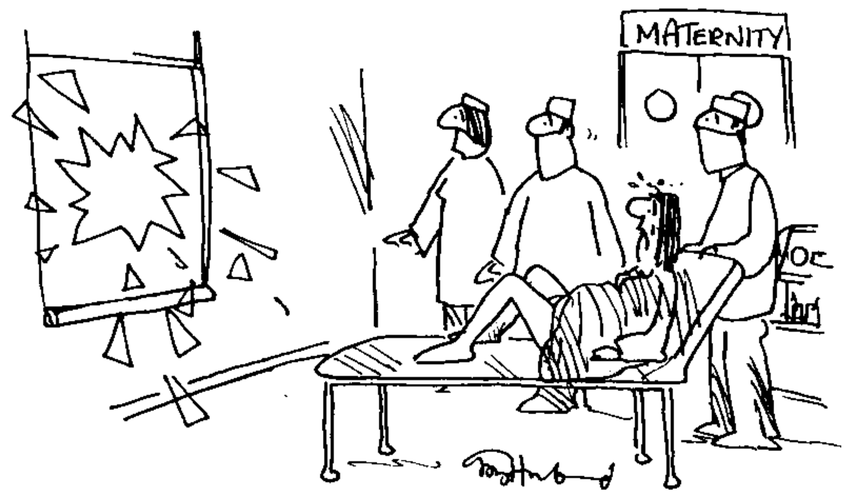
An inquiry is to be held into the circumstances surrounding Mr Ming's tragic demise, since this is the second time in less than two years that a similar fatality has taken place on the notorious Jeremy Thorpe Ward.

A Mr Charles Kennedy was reported to have died of alcohol poisoning, although he was later discovered to have been knifed in the back by an unknown assailant, using an antique Chinese dagger with a handwritten note attached bearing the message "A wee stab afore ye gang".

MING SPEAKS OUT



"I didn't mean for you to push that hard"



● Who Are They? – The Top Ten Runners in the Race to Become Leader of Britain's Third Largest Party?

Chris Huhee, 53, high-flying, telegenic Lib Dem shadow spokesman on low-energy lightbulbs and carbon-neutral paperclips. Educated at St Cakes and Oxfam, Huhee is a passionate moderniser whose book *Whither the Euro?* is a seminal Lib Dem text.

Nick Blogg, 40, high-flying, telegenic Lib Dem shadow spokesman on solar-powered wind farms, coastal flood defences and the Single European Fish. Educated at St Cakes and Oxfam, Blogg is a passionate moderniser whose contribution to the famous Tangerine Book entitled *Whither the Euro?* became an iconic text for the Lib Dem awkward squad (Sid and Doris Oaten).

Dick Clugg, 46, low-flying, telepathic Lib Dem backbencher and member for the Isles of Silly. Clugg made his name with a passionate speech at the 2003 Lib Dem Conference calling for a tax on trouser presses imported from China as a contribution to the fight against global warming.

Alison Yoghourt, 46, even-lower-flying, telescopic former Lib Dem MEP from Humberside. Educated at St Crumpet's School for Girls and the Rolf Harris School of Art, Nuneaton, Yoghourt made her name piloting the Moth Quota scheme through the Strasbourg parliament.

● *That's enough Lib Dem high-flyers, Ed.*

THE BROON-ITES
AH CANNAE HELP FEELIN' SORRY FER WEE MING...
AYE PA BROON, HE'S A POOR AULD GOWK AN' NAE MISTAKE!
CHIP SHOP
TODAY'S SPECIAL DEEP FRIED HAGGIS
JOCKSHIRE POST
AULD SCUNNER GETS THROWN OOT
PRIVATE EYE ON SALE HERE
AND REPLACIN' HIM WI' A DULL, BORIN' WEE SCUNNER WI' AN UPPITY GLOWER, NAE CHARISMA, NAE HUMOUR AN' A DRONIN' VOICE?
I HAVNAE A CLUE, MILIBROON 1, BUT THE GUID THING ABOOT POLITICS IS...
JUVENILE JOVIALITY
SQUARK
...THINGS CAN ALWAYS BE MADE RICHT IN THA' END...
THE LABOUR LADDIES
...BUT LET'S FACE FACTS, HE WASNAE UP TAE THA' JOB WAS HE?
AYE! WHIT WERE THA' LIBS THINKIN' OF, GI'ING THA' BOOT TAE A CHARISMATIC, PHOTOGENIC LEADER WHO WAS A WIZ AT BEIN' ON THA' TELLY-BOX...
WHACK!
CHILDISH CHORTLES
HENRY DAVIES
THERE ALWAYS COMES A TIME WHEN A PARTY COMES TAE ITS SENSES..!
CRIVVENS AND HELP MA JINGS!
LABOUR PARTY HQ
BROON OOT
BROON OOT!
BROON YERE NAE THE DAWGS DANGLY BITS
OOT YE GO BROON
COME BACK TONY, ALL IS FERGIVEN
WHY CANNAE WE HA' MING LEADIN' US?
PARTY MEMBERS SAY... BROON ON YER WAY
SEND BROON TO THE MOON
BROON GET OOT OF TOON
Labour Party Youth wing
SKID!

'MENEZES WAS COKE-FIEND' — Knacker's Shock Claim

by Our Crime Staff **Francine Stockwell**

THE BRAZILIAN electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, shot by police at Stockwell underground station, *had* traces of the banned drug cocaine in his urine, Inspector Knacker of the Yard told a court yesterday.

Said the inspector, "This changes everything. We were right all along. Menezes was no angel, as the media have alleged – he was clearly a junkie, not to say an international drug dealer, who deserved to be executed before he ruined any more innocent people's lives.

"They should be giving my lads a medal for ridding the world of this evil menace, not putting them on trial for some trumped-up health and safety charge just because they happened to kill an innocent man.

"To my mind," said Knacker, "my murder team played their socks off with regard to this one. And I fully deserve my bonus."

Police Tamper with Photo to Make Suspect Look Like Terrorist

PLUS

● **Did the police use dum-dums?** "That's no way to talk about my officers" says Knacker p 94

'OBESITY WORSE THAN SMOKING' — GOVERNMENT TO ACT

by Our Nanny State Staff **Lunchtime O'Bese**

HEALTH Secretary Alan Johnson last night announced a new crackdown on the menace of obesity in public places, which he described as "unacceptable in the 21st century".

Said Mr Johnson, "We are going to adopt a policy of zero tolerance towards all people who choose to inflict their fatness upon others."

Fat Lot Of Good

"In future this Government will introduce a total ban on being fat anywhere in public. This includes pubs, restaurants, trains and the workplace.

"If you want to continue with the disgusting habit of being fat, you will have to go outside and huddle together in doorways with other fat people – that is if you can fit in with Dawn from Accounts and Terry from IT – and make sure you don't obstruct anyone or you will be liable to an on-the-spot fixed penalty of £250."

Where You Can Still Be Fat

1. House of Commons
2. Er...
3. That's it

MY ANGER AT BOOKER PRIZE WINNER

by **Anne Onne**

DISLIKING the Booker prize winner is an international sport but I have to say I disliked Anne Enright earlier than most people. I suppose I was angry with her for her narcissistic public appearances, her strange stilted language and her attempt to interfere in the McCann investigation by writing a very long piece about it in the London Review of Books.

I'm not proud of myself but I

Novels: too thin

suddenly decided I didn't believe all that stuff about novelists having unique insights into current affairs. Why couldn't this woman just accept that her views were probably dead boring?

Maddie Woman

I didn't want to hear any more about her miserable story of family tragedy, I wanted her publicity machine to stop. To be honest I wanted her to simply go away and never mention her bleak prize-winning book ever *(cont. p.94)*

HEATHER 'I'M NOT A GOLD DIGGER'

by Our Legal Staff
DI Vorce and Phil Wallet

"LUCKY" HEATHER Mills was at the centre of a new row over accusations by her ex-husband that her motivation in matters of the heart is "entirely mercenary".

Mills and Boon

"That is hurtful and untrue", she told reporters after her epic and hugely expensive legal battle with Sir Paul was finally concluded yesterday.

"All I want to do is to put this marriage behind me and get on with the rest of my life which I want to spend with my new love, Paul McCartney's lawyer."

Where There's Macca There's Brass

She continued, "I saw him across a crowded courtroom and looked deep into his fees. It was love at first cheque *(is this right? Ed.)*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Deborah Kerr, Hollywood Actress

So. Farewell
Then Deborah
Kerr –

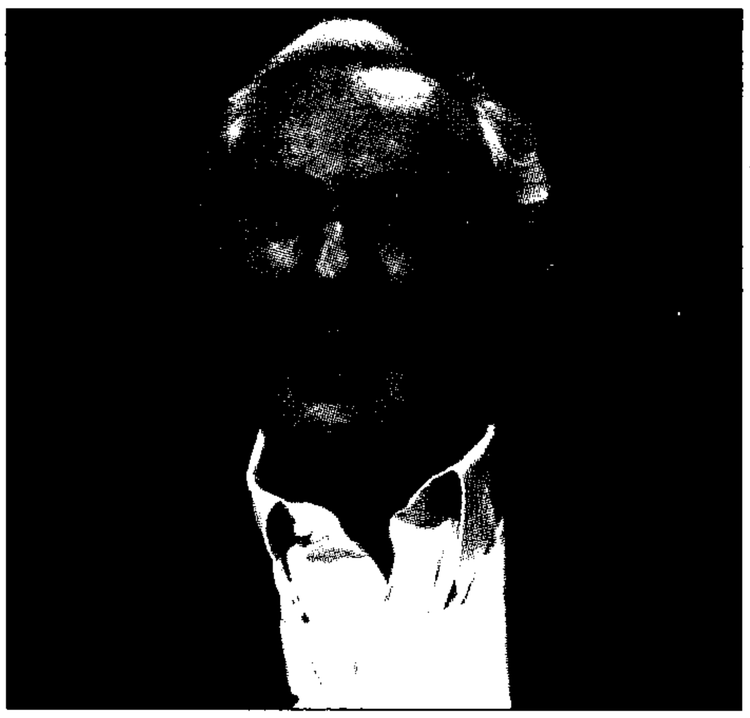
Movie star
Famous for the
Steamy kiss
With Burt
Lancaster
In *From Here*
To Eternity.

You were
Here. and
Now you
Are in
Eternity.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

"This won't take a moment, sir. Would you say it was very hot? Far too hot? Not too hot? Could be hotter?"

DIARY



MICHAEL WINNER'S DIET BOOK

An awful lot of people want to look like a top Hollywood film director.

"How do I get to have a body like Michael Winner?" they ask their personal trainers.

For years, it's been a secret. But now I shall personally tell you how to achieve what is known as 'the look'.

I didn't always have this good a body, you know. Frankly, I used to look like a horrible old man. That's because I'd pig out on ice-cream, suckling pig, caviare and champagne before finishing off my breakfast with a full fry-up, plus jelly and hot creamy custard dessert to follow.

Yum, yum. But it was no good for the old waistline. Why was I getting so fat? I took my highly paid personal physician, the best that money can buy, out to a slap-up meal. Michael, he said – the more fatty food you eat, the fatter you grow.

"Are you really telling me that eating this lovely fat food will make me fat and that if I go on eating like this I'll have a heart attack, keel over and die?" I asked him.

"I'm afraid so," he replied before passing me the plate. "Pork pie, Michael?"

I used to stand in my posing pouch in front of the full-length mirror and gaze at myself every morning and every night. One of my personal assistant would then take a series of full-colour close-ups of my good self with his top-of-the-range camera. It was a typically thoughtful gesture of mine, so's all my lovely lady friends would have something special for their handbags.

"Yum, yum," I'd think. I liked to perform quite a few poses – legs together, legs apart, buttocks together, that sort of thing – just for variety. One pose in particular – very similar to Michelangelo's David – struck me as particularly statuesque. I wrote to Her Majesty, whom I once employed to unveil my new Police Monument, suggesting she might care to have it sculpted at her own expense and erected in central London, as a fitting memorial to tragic WPC Yvonne Fletcher, bless her. But the Queen has not even deigned to reply. With an upbringing like hers, you'd think she'd have learnt manners by now.

Looking again at those photos, it struck me that, though I was barely tipping 18 stone in my posing pouch, I might look even better if I shed a little weight.

But how? The trouble was, I didn't want to disappoint the gorgeous ladies in my life. They included my fiancée, former top international actress and superstar model Jilly Humpington, 59, who always adored me just as I was. In fact, she's forever begging me to eat more sticky buns before urging me to go all-out on the exercise bike. "Go on like this and you'll have my corpse on your hands, my dear!" I sometimes joke. But the poor girl's hearing must be going, because she just smiles and says nothing.

"So what kind of filth do you call this muck when it's at home?" I asked the waiter.

I was in a new restaurant in Chelsea and had just been served something utterly revolting on a plate, I forget what but it still had its head on, poor love, and probably its tail too. Not my sort of thing at all, dear.

I told the young waiter that my good friend famous Hollywood movie star Charlie Bronson would never have accepted such disgusting rubbish.

"When I employed Charlie on my classic hit movie Death Wish 3," I said, "he would eat nothing but the best. First rate lobster, the finest caviare, the most expensive foie gras – anything else he'd throw away and then he'd have the waiter fired. He was the most marvellous character, was Charlie. So don't you dare give me this garbage again, young man! You're only lucky you didn't try serving it to my good friend the late top Hollywood star Marlon Brando, I can tell you!"

The waiter was about to depart when I noticed his hand peeping out from his sleeve.

"Halt!" I said, and ordered him to stretch his chubby little left hand out before me.

"Yes, I'll be having some of that," I said. Then I dug my fork into his wrist and cut off his thumb.

Yum, yum. With a dab of hollandaise it was really quite tasty. What's more it came in at less calories than a small tub of highest quality lard. The lad squealed a bit, but I had a word with the manager. "I can't bear background noise while I eat," I told him in no uncertain terms, and he had him taken him away.

Next morning, I brought out the bathroom scales – I have twelve bathrooms, I might add, each with its own set of scales – and to my delight I found I'd dropped two pounds overnight. I was obviously doing something right!

The next day, I was driven in my vintage Rolls Royce – one of several, I might add – to the beautiful luxury home of my very good friends Sir Michael and Lady Shakira Caine. To his great credit, Michael is a tremendous fan of all my films. He says I always bring them in under budget, than which there is no higher praise. Too many of your arty-farty types bring in their films way over budget, and often even forget to include a decent rape scene. Yet they persist in passing themselves off as film directors!

The food on offer at Michael's was far too fatty. By the end of the meal, I'd left most of it on the side of my plate. But I was still feeling extremely peckish. As the woman next to me – a complete nonentity – was holding forth on a subject of no interest, I couldn't take my eyes off her lovely lean arms. "I'll be having some of that," I thought to myself. I then sank my teeth deep into her lower arm, and helped myself to a decent mouthful.

Scrumptious! For main course, I summoned the waiter, got him to drop his trousers and tucked into a delicious slice of left buttock topped off with double cream. That still left me with the problem of dessert, so I reached over the table, grabbed the head of the Lord Mayor of London and took a superlative bite of nose.

A splendid repast, and no need for cheese. Evening weight: down a full 2lbs. Looking at myself naked in the mirror this morning, I had a stroke of genius: eat yourself, and you'll lose double the weight, whilst saving money you would have spent on eating riff-raff. So I'm having my surgeon remove a nice couple of slices of my own delicious stomach, and my chef to braise them over a low heat with shallots and Beluga caviare. And now you can all be like me just by following my diet! Eat more of yourself and others, my dears! After all, it's only human!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

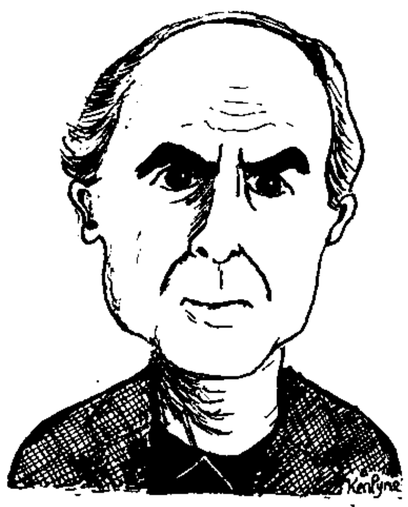
Celeb

LIGGER

HERE'S AN "INTERESTING" QUESTION FROM A FAN ON THE WEB, SIR...
DO YOU SING YOUR OWN SONGS IN THE SHOWER?
PEOPLE ASK THE WEIRDEST THINGS, DON'T THEY?
THEY SURE DO. WHAT SHALL I REPLY?
OF COURSE I DON'T SING MY OWN SONGS IN THE SHOWER...
I HAVE MY BUTLER SING THEM FOR ME.

Literary Review

Sour grapes of Roth



Exit Ghost
Philip Roth
(Jonathan Cape, £16.99)

MOST reviews of Philip Roth's latest novel were written before the winner of this year's Nobel Prize for literature was announced. Roth was the bookies' favourite and widely expected to win. No wonder reviewers were agonisingly eager to praise and excruciatingly diplomatic in their occasional and muted reservations.

Yet the harsh fact is, to judge by the book itself, Roth is not only past his peak but, like his long-running alter ego Nathan Zuckerman, as depicted in this latest outing, morbidly obsessed with his place in posterity.

Roth, now 74, is routinely and lazily described as "the Great American Novelist" (*D. Telegraph*), "America's greatest living novelist" (*Sunday Times*), and "arguably one of the greatest novelists alive anywhere today" (*Guardian*).

The glittering prizes which he has already won, including a Pulitzer, a Pen/Nabokov award and Gold Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, have not been overlooked in the fleshing out of recent interviews and profiles. How tiresome for everyone, then, for the novelist, his publishers, his fawning reviewers and his voracious readers, that a conspiracy of Nordic gnomes should once again have denied him the ultimate literary ennoblement.

He should take heart, though. The writer who pipped him at the post, Doris Lessing, did so after writing *The Cleft*, a novel so bad it was hard not to laugh out loud (so we did: see *Eye* 1177). Roth's is just rather sad. So he could do worse. But he could also, and this is the point, do a lot better.

Roth's reputation is hard to separate from his notoriety, because it is largely (and was for most of his career exclusively) based on his third novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, a depiction of anguished Jewish American adolescence and masculinity chiefly memorable for a scene in which the hero masturbates with a piece of liver intended for (and later consumed in) a family meal.

Roth went on to explore the effects of its success and his own resultant celebrity through the vehicle of his alter ego, Nathan Zuckerman, author of a notorious bestseller called "Carnovsky", all about anguished Jewish American adolescence and masculinity. If there was a touch of onanism in the idea of a writer writing about a writer writing, well, perhaps that was appropriate. Usually, for a writer to turn to his own trade for inspiration is a sign of desperation or laziness. But Nathan Zuckerman has now been the subject, or object or agent, of no fewer than nine of Roth's novels. The series forms a goodly portion of Roth's *oeuvre* and is a mainstay (by proxy) of his reputation. And boy, what a long strange alter ego trip it's been!

Exit Ghost is supposedly the last in the series, and in its title, as well as its concerns, it deliberately recalls the first of the Zuckerman novels, *The Ghost Writer*. So you have the idea of a full circle and therefore, presumably, "closure". In *The Ghost Writer*, set in the 1950s, the young Zuckerman visits his idol, a reclusive short story writer called E.I. Lonoff (allegedly based on Bernard Malamud) and develops a weird fantasy about Lonoff's young mistress, Amy Belette, being a sort of resurrected Anne Frank. In *Exit Ghost*, set in 2004, the elderly Zuckerman, now himself a famous but reclusive writer, re-encounters Amy, now frail and sick, and tries to help her protect the long-dead Lonoff's posthumous reputation from the depredations of an eager but heartless young biographer.

Together they rail against the trivialization of literature in the media by commentators who are only interested in celebrity and scandal, their "dirt seeking snooping calling itself research". But this line has been taken before, and better, in the earlier Zuckerman books, notably *Zuckerman Unbound* and *The Anatomy Lesson*.

Of course, this being a Roth novel, you could not expect to get away without a depiction of male sexual desire and its rejection. Fortunately, the frail old Amy is spared this aspect of Zuckerman's attentions, which are directed instead to Jamie Logan, the female half of a young couple, both writers (there's no escaping them), with whom Zuckerman arranges a house-swap.

Zuckerman can do no more than fantasize (tediously) about his desire for the feisty, breasty Jamie: a brush with prostate cancer has left him both impotent and incontinent, a subject on which he dilates with unnecessary repetition. But perhaps this, like his habit of repeating himself, forgetting what he's already told us, and drifting off inconsequentially, is merely an accurate portrayal of his fading mental potency. The effect, unfortunately, is to highlight the subject of authorial feebleness by being authorially feeble.

Perhaps, after all, it's not such a bad thing to have been given the pip by that cultural cardinals' college in Stockholm. Way back in 1984, when *Zuckerman* had only recently been *Unbound* and was the subject of a newly published *Anatomy Lesson*, Roth gave a *Sunday Times* interviewer (Ian Hamilton, actually) a glimpse into the abyss of his writerly sensitivity:

"If I left out the feuds and the paranoia and the brooding indignation, if I left out the fact that *they are wrong and we are right*, I would not be telling the whole unpretty truth about what goes on inside the egotistical heads of even Nobel Prize winners. I happen to know a couple of Nobel Prize winners. Move in very lofty circles, I do, and let me assure you, despite their Great Contribution to Humanity, they are not so sweet and forgiving as you might expect. They too might not object if their critics were pelted with offal while being drawn down Fifth Avenue in cages."

Many a true word is, apparently, spoken in jest, or sarcasm, or wounded irony. It's almost as though he knew, even then, the toll it would take on his life. Or rather, of course, the life of Nathan Zuckerman. Or counter-life. Or after-life.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

A Life In Letters
Graham Greene
(Edited by Richard Greene)
(Little, Brown)

TO ERICH POLTERGEIST

In 1981 the Nobel-Prize-winning East German novelist Erich Poltergeist invited Greene to speak at a Writers Conference in Leipzig.

Dear Mr Poltergeist,

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to the Writers Conference. Unfortunately I shall be in Peru during November and so will be unable to attend.

I was delighted to receive a copy of your new novel *The Valley of Delusion* and look forward to reading it on my return from South America.

Graham Greene

TO VALERIE GREENE (POSTCARD)

Do you like this picture of an elephant? I wonder what it's going to have for lunch?

Your loving Grandpa

TO ARNOLD TREMLETT

Arnold Tremlett (1903-1991) was a contemporary of Greene's at Berkhamsted. His memoir Eheu Fugaces *was never published.*

Dear Tremlett,

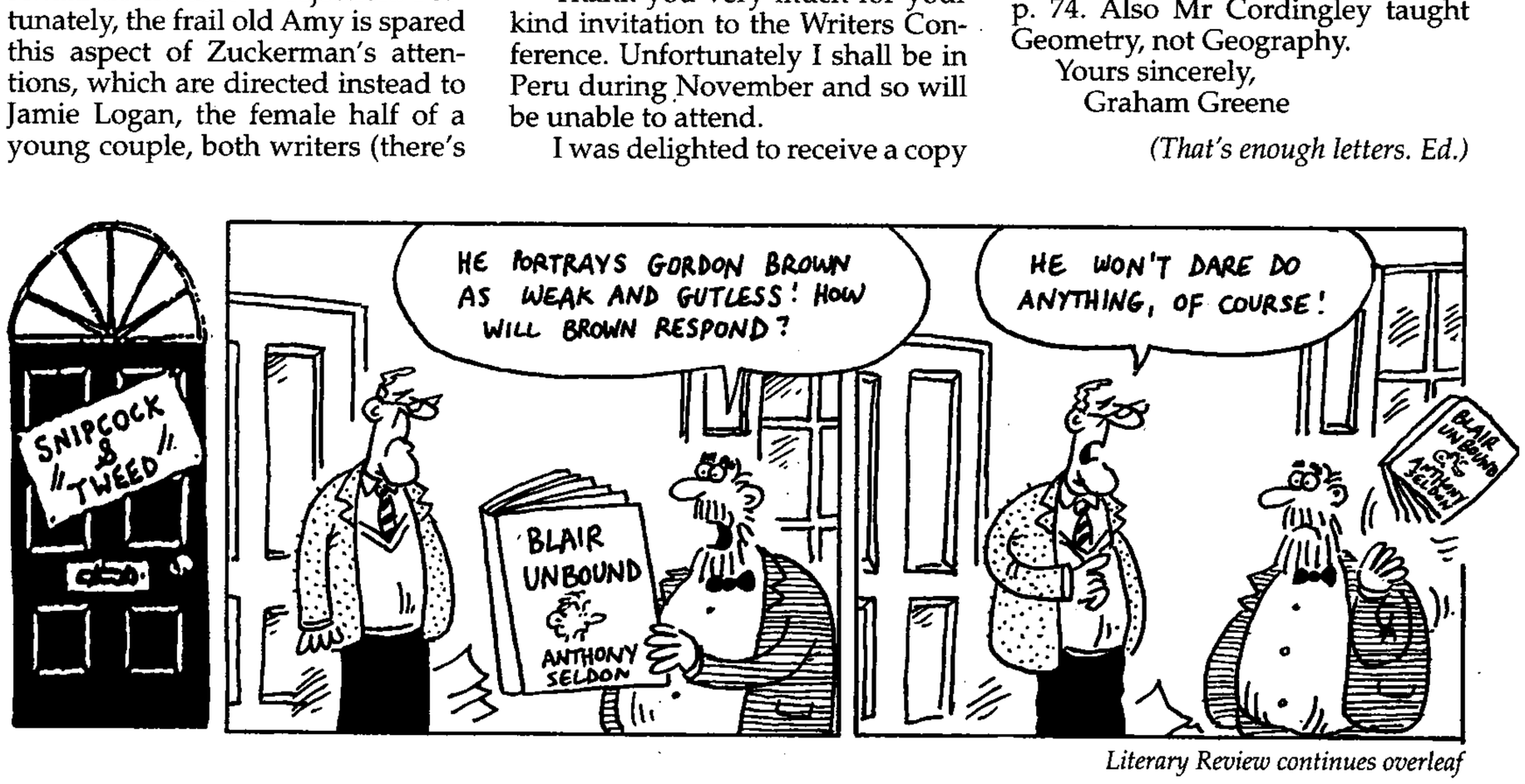
Thank you for sending me the chapter from your memoir, which I have enjoyed reading. I think you have confused A.J. Marnham with his elder brother P.F.B. Marnham on p. 74. Also Mr Cordingley taught Geometry, not Geography.

Yours sincerely,
Graham Greene

(That's enough letters. Ed.)

FIRST DRAFTS

Martin Luther King


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
HE PORTRAYS GORDON BROWN AS WEAK AND GUTLESS! HOW WILL BROWN RESPOND?
BLAIR UNBOUND
ANTHONY SELDON
HE WON'T DARE DO ANYTHING, OF COURSE!

Literary Review continues overleaf

Worstseller Chart – Man Booker Shortlist

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Sales to date
1	Nicola Barker	*Darkmans*	Fourth Estate	2,407
2	Indra Sinha	*Animal's People*	Simon & Schuster	3,003
3	Anne Enright	*The Gathering*	Jonathan Cape	3,687
4	Mohsin Hamid	*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*	Hamish Hamilton	5,097
5	Lloyd Jones	*Mister Pip*	John Murray	5,953
6	Ian McEwan	*On Chesil Beach*	Jonathan Cape	122,631

Books & Bookmen

■ NOT SINCE Keri Hulme won with *The Bone People* in 1985 has such a yawn of boredom greeted the news that the Booker judges, discarding the claims of joint favourites Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* and Lloyd Jones's *Mr Pip*, had plumped for Anne Enright's Irish misery-fest *The Gathering*.

"Depressing novel wins Booker" ran the *Telegraph* headline, while the head buyer at Amazon could be heard complaining that of the six shortlisted books "this is the one that seems not to have caught the imagination of the public in any way". Elsewhere, a few stray voices could be heard cheering the fact that the judges weren't bowing to commercial pressure, choosing what they thought was the best novel and damning the book chains in the process.

Whatever the merits of this discussion, 2007 has been a disaster for the Booker, with all the underperforming big names absent from the longlist, hardly any books sold (see Worstsellers), the McEwan excepted, indifference from the trade, no scandal to speak of and a conspicuous lack of public interest. The clamour of, say, four years ago, when D.B.C. Pierre was accused of plagiarism and Monica Ali of racism, is now only a distant echo. Makeover time must be nigh.

Certainly the Man Group hedge fund that sponsors the prize can hardly be happy. The suits don't even get to see themselves on TV now that the BBC – despite having two supposedly brainy channels, one of which (BBC4) was conceived as a specialist arts service – no longer televises the prizegiving. In fact, no coverage at all would be preferable to what the Beeb does instead: an insultingly brief report by an overexcited correspondent on the 10pm news bulletin; guffaw-inducingly inept summaries of the shortlisted novels; and the announcement of the result carried live but without the winner's brief speech.

What the Booker sponsors really want was made clear in an *FT* article by 2007 prize chairman Howard Davies, a former banker and one of their own. He grumbled about the lack of fiction about, er, *business*. How long before the masters of the universe lose patience?

■ TO THE litany of complaints about "bloated" works of non-fiction (see *Eyes passim*) can be added a lament from the other side of the road – the number of very slim novels for which publishers are charging disproportionately large sums of money.

Recent examples of blatant profiteering include Jonathan Coe's *The Rain Before It Falls* for whose 288 large-print pages Viking Penguin is demanding a whopping £17.99, the 206 pages of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, for which stablemates Hamish Hamilton wants an eye-watering £16.99, and Robert Harris's *The Ghost* (Hutchinson) whose mammoth £18.99 tag might be thought a tad excessive for its modestly-dimensioned 310 page extent.

But pride of place in the racket goes to HarperCollins and the £18.99 levied for the 230 pages of George Macdonald Fraser's *The Reivers*. There is an easy explanation for this mark-up. It allows the firms involved to take part in Waterstone's money off promotions *and* still leave room for margin. Never mind the independent bookseller, of course, who has to put the things on sale at full price and watch the customers go elsewhere.

'Bookworm'

British Council

TIME FOR A REALITY CHEQUE?

THERE was dismay in Ghana this month at news of the British Council's plans to reorganise and "commercialise" its work in Accra.

The council has provided a library and educational services in the city for decades but now seems to fancy itself as a producer of, er, reality TV shows.

According to the *Accra Mail*, all local staff except for director Moses Anibaba were made to resign and reapply for their jobs under new terms and conditions. Staff have been told to expect "a step change in brand positioning" and "income and partnership building at both strategic and operational levels" – whatever that means.

Meanwhile the British Council is busy pushing its "Education UK" brand, encouraging middle class Ghanaian students to study at British universities. The latest wheeze is an upcoming eight-week reality TV series on Ghana's TV3 channel, offering "post-graduate scholarships at leading universities in the UK" as prizes.

These supposedly leading universities are in fact Thames Valley, London Metropolitan and the University of Westminster. The British Council has got pally with mobile phone provider Tigo to produce the show, which will use text voting to pick the three winners from a dozen hopeful graduates.

Pseuds Corner

There is something about [Nicolas] Anelka that recalls Candide of Voltaire's novel. Having joined the Gunners as a naïve young man in 1997, a troubled career that has taken him to Bolton via Real Madrid, Paris-St-Germain, Liverpool, Manchester City and Fenerbahce has suffered its equivalents of an auto-da-fe and the Lisbon earthquake.

MATT SCOTT
Guardian

When we reject Alan Titchmarsh, we reject part of ourselves.

CAITLIN MORAN
The Times

***Bottle Shock** is directed by Randall Miller and stars Bill Pullman, Eliza Dushku, Alan Rickman and Chris Pine. It tells the story of the Barretts, son Bo and father Jim from Chateau Montelena, whose 1973 Chardonnay beat four Burgundies and half a dozen American whites in 1976.*

Producer Jody Savin said, 'This was a seminal moment in the democratisation of wine.'

***Decanter* magazine**

I only realised how important pillows were to my life when I checked into a room at the Carlyle and found that my pillow cases had been monogrammed – a small thing, but enough to evoke an emotional response: it was, to borrow a phrase from Daisy Buchanan, so beautiful it almost made me cry. It made me think about pillows seriously…[*continues*]

NICK FOULKES
Spectator

My uncertainties lead to ironies and a complex absurdity that is central to the brief interval that informs my earthly existence. It is not only a survival strategy for me but a way of playing out a self-conscious comedy of errors…My collecting is ultimately not a search for material artefacts as much as a search for a normative vision of how to live a life.

Californian academic and collector
DR RICHARD JACOBS, quoted in
Craft Potters Association News

And there you have the new black. It's gloss, not goth. It contains high drama and immense sex appeal. It doesn't wait in queues or hide in the loos; it marches right up, centre stage, and winks slowly at its audience before striding for the door with the best-looking man in the room.

MIMI SPENCER
Mail on Sunday

Shibboleth begins with a hairline crack in the concrete floor by the entrance. As insignificant as a flaw in a tea-cup, as telling as the build-up scenes in a disaster movie, the crack soon widens and deepens, a jagged crevasse making its way the length of the Turbine Hall…That this has been a laborious, intensive scene of deliberate destruction adds to its strange, insistent grandeur…We are meant to think not about cracks in the floor but about inequality and iniquity. Shibboleth risks being regarded as a banal cliché: the unblemished surfaces of the liberal art gallery being riven by the ideological cracks opening up beneath. The real problem for Salcedo has been to work in the knowledge that liberal artists absorb the shock artists inflict by assimilation, and that Shibboleth is most likely to be regarded as entertainment . That is art's fate and our loss.

ANDREW SEARLE on 'Shibboleth', a 167-metre crack created by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo at the Tate Modern,
Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: Agnes Hoctor, Jeremy Whitehorn, Stuart Peskett, Nicholas Wood, Ian Howie, Nigel Pearson, Tony Augarde.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

GOVERNMENT WASTE

Bourn with a silver spoon (and knife and fork)

AFTER months of insisting that it would not be in the public interest to tell the *Eye* too much about Auditor-General Sir John Bourn's taxpayer-funded hospitality account, the National Audit Office – motto: "helping the nation spend wisely" – this month finally posted on its website a list of where he has taken his fellow great-and-good over the last three years.

The mouth-watering details include: dinner with a senior representative of a major government supplier at The Square for £253; dinner for Sir John, two of his staff and one government official at Wiltons for a round £500; another meal with a senior government official at Bibendum for £205, and so on *ad nauseam*. One particularly sumptuous evening involved taking a group of Croatian auditors, whose services to the British taxpayer must never be underestimated, to the Berkeley Hotel for a £160 *per head* feed.

What emerges from the full list is just how an independent public auditor does business: 159 one-on-one meals in three years (though Sir John is known to have been up to the same tricks for 20 years), with neither observers nor minutes, an arrangement no minister or civil servant could ever get away with. What's more, Sir John has unrivalled power: complete discretion over which areas of government to investigate and an absolute veto over reports and critical findings, regularly deployed (see *Eyes passim*). Yet the NAO still won't identify his dinner dates – not in the public interest, you understand – simply categorising guests as: senior government officials (28 meals), representatives of suppliers to government (39), suppliers to the NAO (11), parliamentarians (9) and "other" (72).

The *Eye* approached parliament's public accounts commission, which holds the NAO's purse strings, to see if any of its members had been entertained by Sir John. One, Edward Leigh, had.

In his capacity as chairman of the Commons public accounts committee, he and Prince Charles's private secretary, Sir Michael Peat, had been taken for lunch at The Goring (British Restaurant of the Year 2005), though he couldn't recall when. The NAO's list reveals this must have been on 4 December 2006 (at a modest £160). Just five weeks earlier of course Leigh had indignantly called for access to Brian's accounts. Yet in the year since no more has been heard and the demand seems to have been dropped. All quietly sorted over a nice lunch? Nobody knows; but proof, surely, that the public interest would be served by knowing who Sir John has been schmoozing.

The revelations should also make the taxman take note. Rules on entertainment for public officials are tough: it's a taxable benefit unless it's "wholly, exclusively and necessarily" for the job: in other words, if the job couldn't possibly be done without it. And that can't be so with Sir John's troughing as, ever since MPs imposed checks on his spending this summer, he's got by on sandwiches at the desk. Not a single taxpayer-funded gourmet meal since June, poor chap. Yet, as with his privately-used chauffeur-driven car, there's no mention of any benefit in the NAO's accounts.

These aren't his only tax worries. HMRC will also want to look at what Bourn declares from his wife travelling abroad with him. This doesn't, the NAO has confirmed, include her ample share of accommodation and dining costs while away (£1,180 for the pair for three nights in St Petersburg, for example). *Whoops!* The prospect of the national public spending watchdog under investigation by the tax authorities surely looms.

It's not all spend, spend, spend, however. There's plenty of receiving too; largely of hospitality from firms earning billions on projects the NAO should be investigating. In the last six months alone there were 17 such jaunts including polo courtesy of the largest government IT supplier EDS (currently under NAO review for its MoD work); opera with failing private prison operator GSL; the British grand prix paid for by BAE Systems (billions of defence contracts reviewed by NAO every year, never mind buried reports into Al Yammamah); and an MoD reception at the RAC club.

Most gratifying of all, however, must have been a dinner at the Ivy hosted by the biggest consultant on the private finance initiative (happily endorsed by the NAO) and provider of services to the NAO itself, Pricewaterhouse-Coopers. The occasion? A thank you for the judges, including Sir John, of PwC's, er, "Building Public Trust" awards.

A few MPs are starting to question how long Britain can have an unaccountable public spending watchdog who blows so much taxpayer cash on luxury for himself and his wife, operates through intimate unrecorded trysts with the people whose activities he is policing, takes treats from them that most taxpayers can only eye enviously and doesn't follow the tax and accountancy rules he insists others do.

The MPs on the public accounts commission who can actually do something about it, on the other hand, have simply announced the terms of a review into the governance of the NAO. Such is parliament's way with watchdogs – as the parliamentary standards commissioner who was ousted for asking too many questions, Elizabeth Filkin, could testify, only doing the job properly can lead to the sack.

Meanwhile can any NAO report now be taken seriously? How many awkward findings were pulled after an agreeable dinner somewhere pricey paid for by taxpayers? What scandals were passed over for investigation after a convivial night at the opera? And can any public servant listen to a word Sir John has to say about value for money without bursting out laughing?

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF AN AUDITOR-GENERAL...

Let's do lunch

Monday 11 June 2007

- Lunch at Terence Conran's Bibendum with unknown "UK contact". Cost: £86.01.
- Dinner with a senior government official at Wiltons. Cost: £199.

Tuesday 12 June

- Lunch with an NAO colleague and two unspecified "guests" at The Goring. Cost: £222.64.

Wednesday 13 June

- Public accounts commission meets to discuss allegations of excessive junketing by the auditor-general.

Thursday 14 June

- Lunch with an unknown parliamentarian at Brown's Hotel. Cost: £120.

CABIN FUMES

Another leak stew

***PRIVATE EYE* first highlighted the danger posed to aircraft crew and passengers from noxious engine fumes back in 2000. So readers would not have been reassured by the government's belated assertion in the Lords last week that the leaks only happen on one in 2,000 flights.**

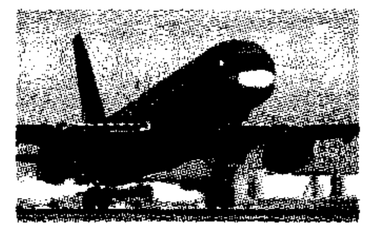
Nor will they have been too surprised to learn that inquiries are currently under way into five incidents involving Flybe aircraft flying in and out of Belfast airport in recent weeks, three of which involved crews being taken to hospital. In one incident, the two pilots had to don oxygen masks and make an emergency landing. (Fortunately, the flight was empty). In another, two cabin crew passed out.

Four of the five incidents involved BAE's infamous 146 aircraft, one of the main culprits for leaking toxic fumes with organophosphates, carcinogens and immuno-suppressants into the cabin and/or cockpit.

Asked about the five incidents between 24 June and 20 September, Flybe said it was "completely confident" that its aircraft are "operated and maintained to the highest industry standards". It added that the 146 was a small and diminishing part of the Flybe fleet and none would be left after February next year.

But Dessie Henderson, of the Unite union, said that some crew members were still unable to work, with symptoms including sickness and violent headaches.

Despite reports of noxious fumes in cockpits and cabins, the aviation industry continues to deny that it is poisoning pilots and passengers by exposing them to toxic engine oil fumes. But last week Lord Tyler, the Lib Dem peer, attacked BAE Systems for buying the silence of two Australian airlines which alleged 14 years ago that design faults meant the 146 was leaking just such "obnoxious oil and other fumes" into the cabins. Details of the secret deals were disclosed in the *Eye* last month, and Lord Tyler asked: "What is the government's reaction to the fact that BAE seems to be more concerned about the leak of this document than about the leak of toxic fumes into aircraft cabins and cockpits with potentially disastrous consequences?"



Of course, the arms and aerospace giant could rely on its friends in government. There was no cover-up or conspiracy, said aviation spokesman Lord Bassam as he assured fellow peers that "only a very small number of people ever subsequently report being unwell".

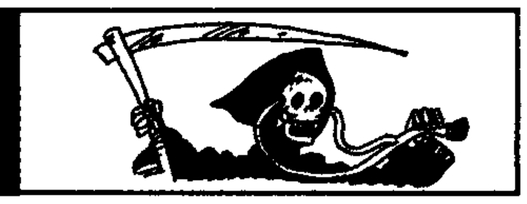
His dismissal did not go down well with John Hoyte, a BAE146 pilot whose flying career ended after he suffered cognitive failures and ill health from what he describes as prolonged exposure to polluted air. Hoyte is a founder member of the Aerotoxic Association, for flight crews exposed to fumes. He said some cabin crew had letters from company doctors advising them against further flying on the BAE 146 because of concerns the aircraft may be adversely affecting their health. Yet the aircraft itself is passed fit for public transport. Shome mishtake, surely?

NUMBER CRUNCHING

Only £650m Amount Alistair Darling claims Tories will raise through their proposals to charge non-domiciled taxpayers

£650m Amount Alistair Darling claims he will raise through his superior "alternative measures"

HEALTH CHECK



HOSPITAL DEATHS

Now wash your hands of this one...

THE Healthcare Commission's inquiry into the Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust did more than just expose bad management of filthy conditions in their hospitals that caused an estimated 90 deaths from *Clostridium difficile* infection.

The report also showed how Labour's health policies lay behind the failures. Instead of concentrating on keeping the hospital clean and dealing with infection outbreaks, the board was "preoccupied with finances, and had a demanding agenda for reconfiguration and private finance initiative, all of which consumed much management time and effort". Debt, the PFI and launching an Independent Sector Treatment Centre (ISTC) all "occupied senior managers' time and compromised the control of infection, and hence the safety of patients".

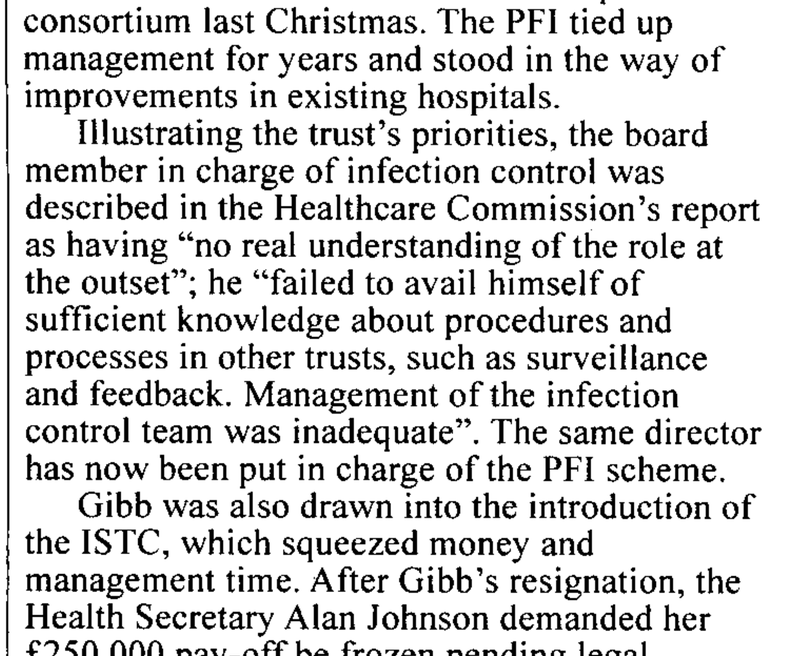
Financial shortages – made acute by former Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt's balance-the-books drive – led to staff shortages and distracted management. Instead of addressing the low number of nurses, for example, this January the trust wrote to staff asking them to work a free day to help tackle £17m of debt. Meanwhile trust bosses put their time and energy into creating a PFI hospital at Pembury outside Tunbridge Wells, announced in 2001 but only signed and sealed in a £300m deal by the trust's chief executive Rose Gibb with the Equion consortium last Christmas. The PFI tied up management for years and stood in the way of improvements in existing hospitals.

Illustrating the trust's priorities, the board member in charge of infection control was described in the Healthcare Commission's report as having "no real understanding of the role at the outset"; he "failed to avail himself of sufficient knowledge about procedures and processes in other trusts, such as surveillance and feedback. Management of the infection control team was inadequate". The same director has now been put in charge of the PFI scheme.

Gibb was also drawn into the introduction of the ISTC, which squeezed money and management time. After Gibb's resignation, the Health Secretary Alan Johnson demanded her £250,000 pay-off be frozen pending legal advice.

According to the Healthcare Commission, the Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) repeatedly pointed to the hygiene problems driving the "superbug" infections. Their reports informed one hospital committee, whose quarterly bulletins correctly identified most of the issues driving the outbreak. But "it was seldom possible to see where these minutes or reports had been considered at higher levels in the trust or to identify action taken", said the commission.

PALS are part of Labour's replacement for Community Health Councils; Labour promised they would be more representative and more effective. Tunbridge Wells previously had an active and noisy CHC, but Labour's PALS said the right things and were simply ignored.



Wringing their hands? Ex chief executive Rose Gibb, Dr Grant Rex of Partnership Health Group and Health Minister Andy Burnham at the opening of the ISTC in June

Acute discomfort

IN ITS report on NHS trusts last week, the Healthcare Commission dished out the double whammy of "weak" ratings on both "quality of services" and "use of resources" to just five acute hospital trusts.

Eye readers won't be surprised to learn that of these three (60 percent) – West Hertfordshire, Worcestershire and Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells – either have huge private finance initiative schemes or have spent the last few years negotiating them.

Across the board less than 30 percent of acute trusts either have or are negotiating PFI deals, suggesting PFI hospitals are twice as likely to fail on management and services – never mind the link with crippling deficits that the *Eye* has already exposed (*Eye* 1184).

With billions of pounds worth of hospital PFI deals in the pipeline, despite all the evidence PFI remains the government's method choice for building them.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£250,000 Sum offered to Rose Gibb, outgoing chief executive of Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells Trust, as severance pay

£25,000 Sum allocated to replace commodes in the Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells Trust, 48 percent of which were unfit for purpose

Up hill, down Dale

PROBLEMS with ambulances arriving very late and being unable to locate emergencies within the Yorkshire Dales were on the agenda at Aysgarth parish council earlier this month.

However, Yorkshire Ambulance bosses Vince Larvin and Keeley Townend arrived at Thornton Rust village hall 20 minutes late. They couldn't find the village where the meeting was being held.

MEDICINE BALLS

How the BMA works (part 2)

IN JUNE, M.D. received serious allegations about the IT system used by the BMA. These related to the competence of the IT management team and the new IT membership system itself, its soaring costs and the extra employees needed to run it, and allegations of data protection lapses in the BMA database.

M.D. shared these with BMA chief executive Tony Bourne, only to receive a curt email from BMA solicitor Matthew O'Flynn: "We reject your allegations in their entirety and reserve our legal position." M.D. then contacted senior doctors on the BMA council. As a result, the allegations "rejected in their entirety" became the basis of a "thorough investigation". What was needed was an independent, expert audit of the new BMA IT system published and shared with the membership.

Instead the BMA opted for an internal review lead by O'Flynn, Jonathan Waters, the director of legal services, and Kevin McMahon, director of human resources. None is an IT specialist and they couldn't hope to analyse the complexities of the new system. Instead their investigation consisted of asking "invited employees" what they thought of the allegations, if they had any involvement in making the allegations and if they had any "reasonable suspicion" who had. Some interviewees were too frightened to speak truthfully about their IT concerns and there was a strong emphasis on hunting down the whistleblower.

The "investigation" concluded that the BMA IT department had no case to answer and fingered an alleged whistleblower whom MD had never heard of or from. The employee was suspended and subsequently wrongly dismissed for his involvement in disseminating allegations to the *Eye*, in direct contradiction to an email MD received from Jonathan Waters on 2 October: "I confirm that a BMA IT employee has been suspended, on full pay, pending a disciplinary interview. I would like to reassure you that the reason for the suspension is not, in any way, connected with any alleged whistleblowing."

Doubtless the BMA solicitors would argue that the allegations were malicious, not genuine, and thus feel exempted from the Public Interest Disclosure Act. But the fact that the BMA management is so incompetent as to focus its investigation on a witch hunt, fire an innocent employee for whistleblowing and lie about it suggests that there was never any intention to thoroughly investigate the IT department. The report is written on unheaded notepaper and is marked "strictly private and confidential". It will never be seen by the membership. If it exonerates the IT management, what have they got to hide?

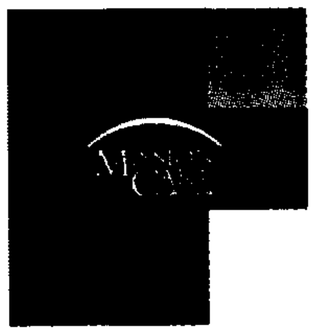
BMA managers clearly think the case is closed. As Brian Butler, director of communications, put it in an email to M.D.: "I have seen the correspondence between you and various members of the BMA regarding serious allegations made in a document which you sent to the BMA on 24 June 2007. This has been the subject of a thorough internal investigation which found the allegations to be unfounded and in some instances defamatory. We will not be entering into correspondence again with you on this matter." It makes me proud not to be a member.

M.D.

CARE OF THE ELDERLY

Mission implausible

ALLEGATIONS of neglect and abuse in one of Mission Care's old people's homes have been made to police following the publication of the latest in a series of critical reports by inspectors.



In August when Colin Bloom, the Christian charity's chief executive, was assuring the *Eye* that problems were in the past and "our care is now among the best" (see *Eye* 1192), inspectors at its Elmwood Home in Bickley, Kent, found this to be far from the case.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection found a catalogue of failings including two residents with bed sores so severe they had reached the bone, even though one had been recorded as "healed" and was only detected when the resident was transferred to another home.

In addition call bells were out of reach of residents; one resident had had only bed baths for more than a year; others were unkempt and unshaven with their hair and fingernails not attended to; some had complained of rough handling and staff being abrupt or unable to communicate because of language difficulties; drugs prescribed for one patient appeared to have been given to another; dosages and prescriptions were not up to date and medication was left lying around with no indication who it was for.

Once again the inspectors found that the home, which has been dogged by problems since it opened in 2005, met just nine of the 33 basic standards of care.

Eileen Chubb, one of the "Bupa Seven" whistleblowers who now campaigns for those in care homes, was so alarmed by the medication records she prepared a report for the Kent police alleging that it may indicate illegal and widespread misuse of drugs within the home. "It simply beggars belief that a catalogue of medication abuse could be noted and still not reported to police post-Shipman," she said. The police have referred her report to both Bromley social services and the home inspectors.

Meanwhile campaigners have found that Bromley council, which has contracts with Mission Care to house its residents, has been discussing a "confidential" report on complaints about the dementia service provided at the charity's nearby Homefield centre. But none of those who have publicly raised concerns about the treatment of their loved ones – including Linda Wright, whose 85-year old mother nearly died from "pre-terminal pneumonia and septic shock" (*Eye* 1192) – has been interviewed. They have now written to the council asking for the report to be made public.

David Evans, a solicitor and Mission Care director, said the home had received "no formal notification" from the police of the allegations and it "strongly disagreed with much of the CSCI report and remained in despute with them about it.

"However, we note that the report states that there are positive reports from Social Services Care Managers and other professionals… The author notes that there are identified improvements in the service over recent months."

Of the bed sores he said "probably the majority of people we care for come to us with serious tissue viability issues" and that the *Eye* should provide legitimate medical evidence that supports the assumption that these problems have arisen or worsened during the individuals' period of residence within a Mission Care home".

The *Eye* of course relies upon the inspectorate report, which says: 'The healthcare needs of residents are not currently being addressed due to the medication practices and issues around pressure care."

Page concern

THE charity that supports elderly people in poverty, Age Concern, has stumped up £815,000 to pay a departing chief following a dispute with senior management.

Tony Page, who was the director of a trading arm of the charity, Age Concern Enterprises Ltd, left following a disagreement about Heyday, Age Concern's doomed membership organisation for the over-50s, which Page managed until just before its launch in May 2006. Set up to help baby-boomers prepare for retirement, Heyday offered products such as insurance as well as a stronger political voice.

Internal documents show that Age Concern aimed to recruit 796,000 members in its first year, later revised to 300,000. So far it has recruited just 44,000, most of them transferred across from an existing membership organisation and not even in the target age group, but over 65. In total, £16.4m has been ploughed into the enterprise; and despite finally admitting in June that it had failed in its core aims, Age Concern still plans to invest another £3m.

Although charities are legally required to be open and transparent, Age Concern refused to reveal how much had been spent on the failed project until its accounts were published last month. The sum paid to Page is mentioned in a footnote, which shows that £90,000 was received for "intellectual property rights" and £80,000 for "an agreement on confidentiality and other protection of Age Concern Enterprises' business interests". Much of the rest was for consultancy by Page's company, Network Enterprises Ltd.

It is believed Page disagreed with the decision to move responsibility for day-to-day management from Age Concern Enterprises to the charity. The debacle has led to fierce internal criticism, with some Age Concern members calling for an independent inquiry into senior management, but so far nobody has been held to account. Age Concern said it could not comment on the payment to Page or the terms of his departure because of a confidentiality agreement. So that's all right then.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ MMR LEGAL AID: Mr Justice Davis has been cleared of any wrongdoing for not disclosing that his brother was a director of Glaxo SmithKline when he sanctioned the withdrawal of legal aid from families who claim their children were damaged by the drug company's MMR vaccine.

The Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC) has advised more than 100 parents who complained of a conflict of interest that the high court judge states categorically that he was not aware at the time that his brother, Sir Crispin Davis, was a non-executive director of GSK, one of three defendant drug companies in the MMR controversy.

But when the *Eye* and others asked his office about a potential conflict five months ago, a statement was issued on his behalf which said: "In 2003, Mr Justice Davis' brother was appointed as a non-executive director of GSK. At the date of the hearing before Mr Justice Davis (February 2004), the possibility of any conflict of interest arising from his brother's position was not raised with him and did not occur to him. If he was wrong, any possible remedy must be sought from the court of appeal."

This is not quite the same as saying he knew nothing about it. The parents are now asking Sir John Brigstocke, the judicial ombudsman, to investigate this apparent inconsistency. They are also questioning whether the OJC was right to dismiss a second complaint of a possible conflict. Sir Crispin is also chief executive of Reed Elsevier, publisher of the *Lancet*. Although the magazine published the original controversial research by Dr Andrew Wakefield and others at the Royal Free Hospital, its editor Richard Horton had been widely quoted just before the legal aid hearing saying the study was flawed because of an alleged conflict with the litigation.

■ GURPAL VIRDI: Scotland Yard appears incapable of learning lessons after an employment tribunal found that Sergeant Gurpal Virdi had been victimised by his bosses *for a second time*.

In 2002 the Metropolitan police had to pay Mr Virdi £240,000 for racial discrimination after it emerged that in 1998 he had been fitted up by his west London colleagues for allegedly sending race hate mail to fellow ethnic minority officers.

Now the Met will have to pay again after another tribunal found that it victimised Sgt Virdi by refusing him promotion in 2005, not this time on racial grounds but because he had previously won a discrimination case against them.

Meanwhile at Virdi's old police station at Ealing, officers still appear to be up to their old tricks. Staff were told last month to ensure that they properly exit the computer system when they have finished work because "there have been occasions recently where people have left themselves logged on and messages sent to other members of staff that are inappropriate".

The instruction from a Carol Stone added: "Messages sent by someone else on your system is a discipline issue – please do not get caught out." When Sgt Virdi was finally able to prove that he had been framed, no officer was ever "caught out" because no one ever bothered to find the culprit. Neither was anyone ever held responsible for the persecution and unlawful treatment of Sgt Virdi, including the "excessive" anti-terrorist style search of his home, nor for wasting the vast sums of taxpayers' money the Met has paid out during its pursuit of Virdi (who still has two claims outstanding).

BMW BRIDLEWAY ROW

Break horse power?

NO ONE expects car manufacturers to be eco-friendly. But the German giant BMW has just excelled itself by defeating two small charities and winning the right to close a 2,000-year-old public bridleway and part of an old Roman way in order to develop its plant at Cowley, outside Oxford.

The British Horse Society and the Ramblers Association were also ordered to pay nearly £50,000 in costs to Oxfordshire county council, which had supported the car maker.

While BMW has agreed to provide an alternative route for pedestrians and cyclists, it is not prepared to entertain horses and riders on its land, claiming no horse or rider was seen on the bridleway during its surveys.

But the BHS, which sees equestrian rights of way shrinking year by year, forcing riders on to roads, says a vital safe link for horses to reach a nearby country park has been lost. The nearest alternative route to the park means riders will now have to negotiate their way round a busy roundabout, on to a dual carriageway and finally cross two lanes of traffic to get on to another restricted by-way… no doubt angering all those BMW drivers in a hurry who believe roads are for cars only.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

US PRESIDENT Harry Truman had a sign on his desk stating that "the buck stops here". Hearings by the Commons treasury select committee into Northern Wreck have shown that, apart from the clear disadvantage that the tripartite system to regulate banks (created by Gordon Brown when chancellor) does not work, it also creates a buck-passing opportunity for everybody to blame everybody else.

So far the Bank of England, the Fundamentally Supine Authority and the directors of Northern Wreck have all had their day before the committee and all sung from the same "not my fault" hymn-sheet. This week will no doubt see Brown's Scottish stooge, Chancellor Alistair Darling, doing the same on behalf of the Treasury – the political boss of both the Bank and the FSA. It is most unlikely that Darling will criticise the tripartite system, as to do so would be for the puppet to question the puppet master. Similarly he is unlikely to blame the FSA, itself a Brownite creation. So expect more of the unpredictable, perfect storm argument, with any blame directed more at the Northern Wreck board than at Treasury officials, Bank governor Mervyn King or FSA regulators.

"Shirley, I can explain..."

Treasury committee MPs would, however, do well to press Darling as to why he still believes that the division of regulatory powers to intervene between the Bank and the FSA – exposed as ineffective at its first real test – is superior to the old model discarded by Brown, under which the central bank made the decision if and how a failing bank was to be saved. Especially as this is still the model relied upon by the Americans, the Japanese and, to some extent, the Germans, who have all had similar financial crises in the period since Labour came to power.

The sub-prime mortgage crisis and the resulting credit crunch hit in Germany shortly before the shockwave rolled over Northern Wreck. During August, two little-known German banks were bailed out: IKB and Sachsen LB. These operations involved other German banks acting in liaison with an embarrassed Bundesbank and the banking investigator BaFin, who share responsibility for the banking sector.

The two banks required multi-billion loans and guarantees in intervention operations along similar "coalition of the willing" lines to those used more directly by the Bank of England in bailing out the "fringe" banks of the early 1970s. The effect was to prevent a rerun of the scenes from the 1930s outside Northern Wreck branches. Arguments about EU and stock market rules, which supposedly prevented the Bank of England or the FSA from acting, did not appear to get in the way of either rescue. IKB, like Northern Wreck, was listed.

The Fed, too, has acted to manage similar perceived crises, such as that over the Long-Term Capital Management hedge fund in 1998, and this year as several smaller banks have gone to the wall. The US Treasury is now trying to prevent any further economic damage from the sub-prime crisis by endorsing the $75bn mortgage securities superfund backed by Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase and Bank of America.

This would buy up otherwise unsaleable "assets" (collateralised debt obligations or other derivatives and asset-backed commercial paper) held by them and other banks, structured investment vehicles, conduits, hedge funds or other investors to free up capital and prevent any further collapses. Who, other than the trio, would benefit and who would decide and how and at what price assets were dumped into the superfund, thereby dictating the extent of the losses to be taken, remains unclear. Which is why the whole idea may be a non-starter.

Cynics recall how John D. Rockefeller tried to stop the Great Crash of 1929 by declaring that his family was buying shares. The response was: "Sure – who else has any money left?" The result was Black Tuesday, when shares fell even faster. The current US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, a former Goldman Sachs banker, appeared unmoved until his former friends and colleagues started to bleed. That he is now so worried suggests that it really is serious. As does Darling's advice to Northern Wreck depositors (so reminiscent of Captain Mainwaring): "Don't panic!" MPs might ask Darling if he believes that British banks should be creating a similar fund to limit the collateral sub-prime damage from not just US but UK mortgages, which are expected to see a steady rise in repossessions into 2008.

After the Bank of Japan was caught out by the money market freeze following the 1997 collapse of brokers Yamaichi Securities, it decided it would have to control both the liquidity of money markets and the regulation of banks.

Brown and the Treasury ignored the lessons from the US and Japan in pushing through the tripartite system, which ended up with nobody in charge and everybody blaming everybody else.

Another lesson ignored by Northern Wreck and those supposed to be regulating it was that fear does make money markets temporarily seize up, leaving even banks unable to borrow. It happened with Russian banks after the rouble crisis of 1998, which in part triggered the LTCM collapse. It happened in Japan after Yamaichi in 1997 and with various Thai and other Asian banks during the 1997 regional crisis. It was threatening to happen to German banks after the problems at IKB and Sachsen emerged – which was why the Bundesbank backed action by the bigger banks.

Despite these warnings from history, the FSA continued to approve of the Northern Wreck business model, which relied for three quarters of its funding on the money markets rather than depositors. The risk that the money markets would be closed to Northern Wreck – as they had been to banks within the past decade – was simply ignored, both by directors and regulators.

Not only did the FSA approve of that high risk model, it perversely allowed Northern Wreck to reduce the amount of capital it was required to hold in its reserves. The former building society was one of the first banks to be approved under the new Basel II capital adequacy rules that kicked in from January 2007. It boasted that there would now be more free capital to spend on dividends or share buy-backs! Ironically, Basel II perceived mortgage lenders like Northern Wreck as less risky than commercial banks, and so required them to hold substantially smaller capital reserves. Some estimates suggested Northern Wreck would free up as much as £500m from its required reserves under Basel II.

"The additional capital will allow us to do three things: support growth, facilitate acquisitions and allow share-buy-backs," Dave Jones, deputy finance director at Northern Rock, told mergermarket.com in May. "It will also make us more potentially attractive as an acquisition target for the larger European banks."

This optimistic view was accepted by the FSA. Months after their approval, Northern Wreck has borrowed £16bn and counting from the Bank of England – four weeks after it announced a £3bn emergency facility it was not expecting to use because of the guarantees provided by Darling and Brown!

The FSA is answerable to the Treasury, so the MPs, who were less than impressed with the performance of its chairman Sir Callum McCarthy before them, should pursue their criticisms of the regulator's role. FSA insiders say the supervision of Northern Wreck was typical of how the regulator now works. It is suggested that this was largely left to one supervisor whose line managers had either quit or were leaving – part of the largescale churn of FSA supervisory staff, which is why FSA supervision generally is seen as lacking in experience. Supervisors and managers who deal with banks and other lenders are too often outgunned and no match for hard-charging executives with their ranks of high-paid advisers.

Morale is poor, and not helped by pay and pension benefits well below those available in the City. FSA supervisors are regularly poached by those they used to regulate for twice to three times their salaries. Earlier this year, the FSA organised a get-together for staff at the pricey Brewery venue in the City. During the event, attended by the FSA top brass, staff were asked whether they believed there was a "blame culture" within the organisation. A large majority replied in the affirmative. No wonder, therefore, McCarthy and new chief executive Hector Sants say Northern Wreck was not their fault.

IT WILL BE interesting to see whether MPs on the Commons public administration select committee establish from deputy assistant commissioner John Yates and senior Crown Prosecution Service official Carmen Dowd why Scotland Yard's "cash for honours" did not result in any charges relating to the clearly false Labour party accounts.

The 2004 party accounts did not disclose several of the secret million-pound loans made by would-be peers. These loans had been made in 2005 before the 2004 accounts were signed off in June, and so were clearly disclosable as material post-balance sheet events/liabilities.

The existence of the loans was kept from the party's auditors Horwath Clark Whitehill. Both would seem to be criminal offences under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. This is an entirely separate issue to whether the loans were commercial and so disclosable. The non-disclosure would have put firmly in the frame

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NUMBER CRUNCHING

£120,000 Yearly pension which Gordon Brown told Lord Falconer he would not be paid

1,200 Words in article Lord Falconer wrote for Times attacking Gordon Brown for his lack of vision

the then party treasurer, Matt Carter, who signed the accounts and answered to the Dear Leader, who knew about the loans. So why has no action been taken over issues which are far clearer than whether or not the secret lenders were promised peerages for their loans?

EVEN former Tory minister Baroness Lynda Chalker has finally seen the light at Equator Exploration (*Eyes passim*) and resigned after two years as a non-executive director, following last month in the wake of chairman Sam Jonah.

Chalker served on Equator's audit and governance committees. Well, that will save having to explain anything to shareholders who are still marooned in the AIM-listed but still suspended company, whose chief executive, Wade Cherwayko, promised so much about its oil prospects in offshore Nigeria and delivered so little. Just as he had done before with Canadian company Abacan Resources.

PLANET FOOTBALL:

MUCH has been made by major shareholder Alisher Usmanov and his allies of what he can do for Arsenal. But a study of the Russian oligarch's performance the last time he was involved with British companies does little to impress.

From April 1997 until December 1998, Usmanov was a director of Dominion Energy, now called Tecteon. Dominion's major shareholder was Middlesex Holdings, for whom Usmanov was their man in Russia and also a large shareholder. Usmanov did not disclose – as was required by Stock Exchange regulations – that he had a criminal conviction and had been jailed in 1980 for six years on fraud and corruption charges. Usmanov has always maintained he was the completely innocent victim of a "political" frame-up and the conviction was overturned, but not until 2000.

In January 2003 Usmanov became a director of Middlesex, which by then was a gas and petrol distributor with steel interests that had been renamed Global Natural Energy, and is now the AIM-listed GNE Group. His partner at Arsenal, Farhad Moshiri, was chief executive. Usmanov was paid £92,000 that year. He already held share options at prices from 150p to 300p. That year, GNE turned a £295,000 profit into a £791,000 loss. Usmanov converted a £1.4m loan into shares at 260p. The shares at the end of 2003 were 215p.

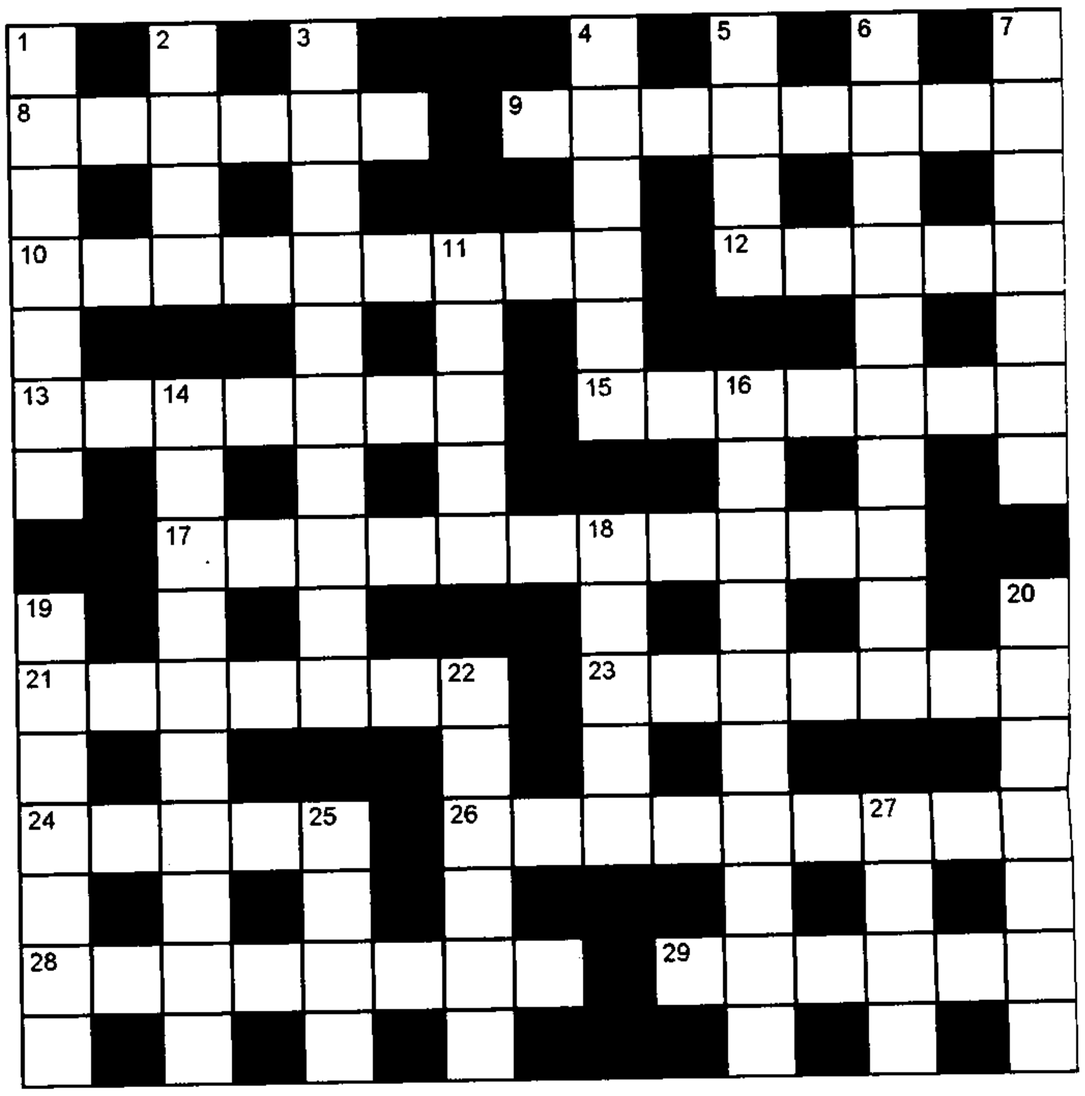
For 2004, GNE showed a turnaround to a £308,000 profit, but the shares had dropped to 180p. Usmanov was paid £75,000 but did not bother to attend any of the seven board meetings. In 2005, GNE plunged back into the red losing £788,000. The shares fell to a year's low of 108p.

In March 2006 Usmanov resigned from GNE, which later that year sold off its steel interests to him and said farewell to Moshiri. Usmanov never exercised any of his 515,000 share options – perhaps not surprisingly, as by December 2006 the share price was down to 96p, having been as low as 70p. That year the company recorded another loss of £488,000 and wrote £1.3m off the value of its assets following a near £1m write-off the previous year. The new board said: "It is hoped that the new business model will be better able to produce more consistent trading results and cashflow." But then, running public companies in Britain is somewhat different to running businesses in Russia. A point which may not be lost on Arsenal shareholders.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 351

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 2 November 2007

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

8 From Dewar, bleeding twitter (6)

9 Uranium applied to member? Member's revolting! (2,2,4)

10 Sailor (vulgar one) Ball gets piles (9)

12 Dubya not quiet about "insect" African people (5)

13 Infantile, shit bank robber is $1000 down without a robbery (3,4)

15 Smitten, sporting an erection – success! (4-3)

17 'Pencil' not up, sadly? Could be the tabloid's one is too low (6,5)

21 Heard rumour: "time lost vibrating part of organ" (7)

23 One of Brown's men takes issue but Bush's convenience comes first (7)

24 A tragic figure, squeezing hard, he scored (5)

26 Petty irritations and ATM requirements besieging Dick (9)

28 Getting a hard-on with promotion all around (8)

29 Doing nothing but sneaking up topless (6)

DOWN

1 Almost the end of Brown being collared by stupid arse and bloody heartless Trust (5,2)

2 Tory grandee united – leader cut out tongue (4)

3 Dope: lump given to Springer (10)

4 Talk of leak being suppressed by school (6)

5 Dick stands on head to screw (4)

6 Hawking's source of IC shit? Born awkward (10)

7 Ex-PM has cracked! About to give up! (7)

11 US agency sending people up over length of organ (5)

14 Ooh-er, organ's made manky by this? (10)

16 Queen's common consort: difficult profession (5,5)

18 Half a month in jail to produce this sort of music? (5)

19 Stage bloke on second is pissed (7)

20 Local indicator of sinning getting out of control (3,4)

22 Brooding party leader needs quick surgery internally (6)

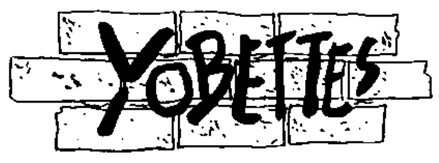
25 Bovril enema involves needle (4)

27 Bill's cocaine dose (4)

Crossword 350 winner: AMANDA TANFIELD

ACROSS: 7 Neighbours 8 GSOH 11 Oasis 12 Kray Twins 13 Yummy mummies 17 Outback 19 Deserve 20 Americanised 23 Brazil nut 25 Dodge 26 Sake 27 No-nonsense.

DOWN: 1 Unholy row 2 First mate 3 Chesty 4 Cocksucker 5 Orca 6 This 10 Stress 14 Medication 15/23 President Bush 16 Beady eyes 18 Armpit 21 Nudist 22/9 Jack Shit 24 Nook.



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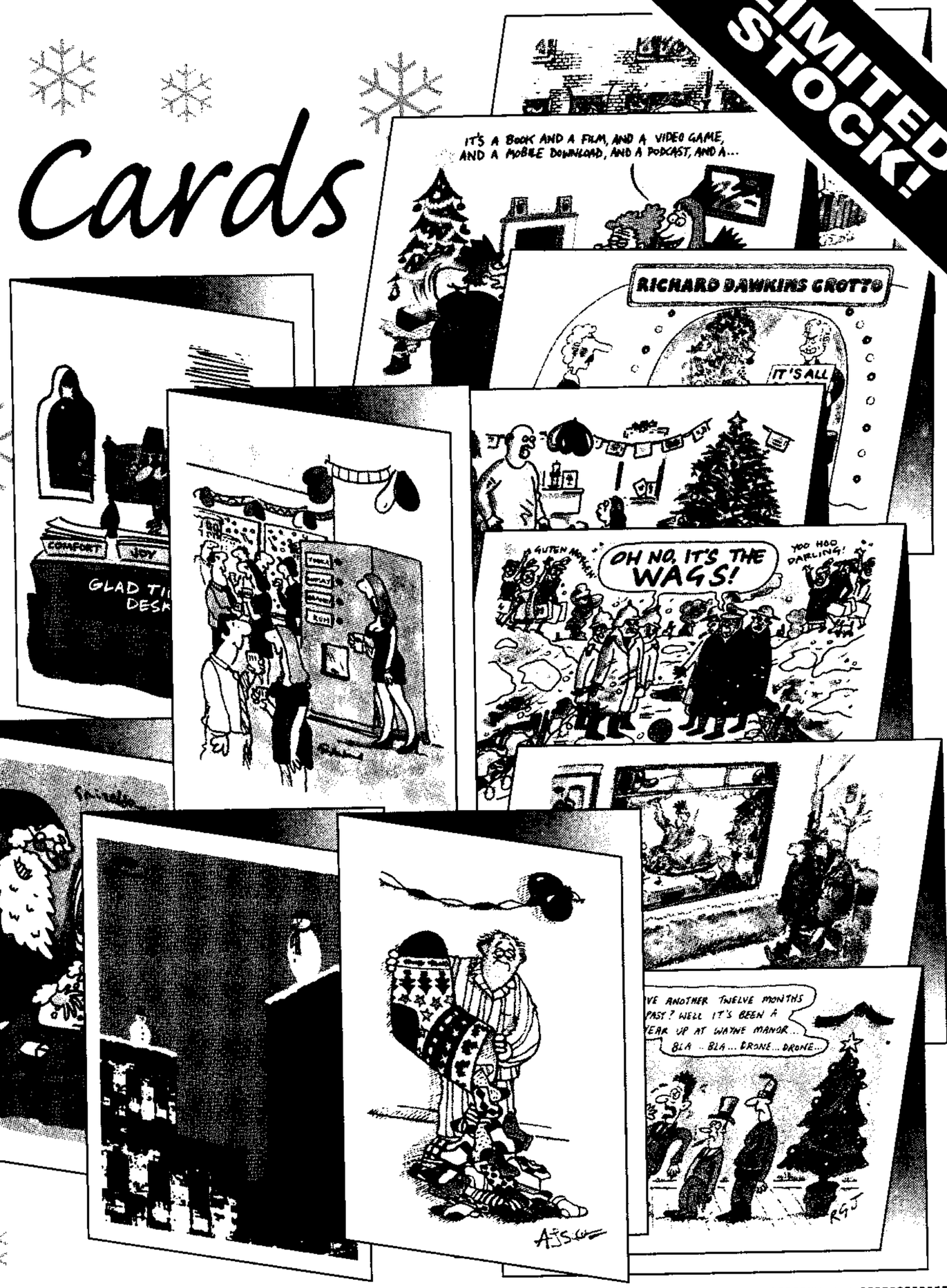
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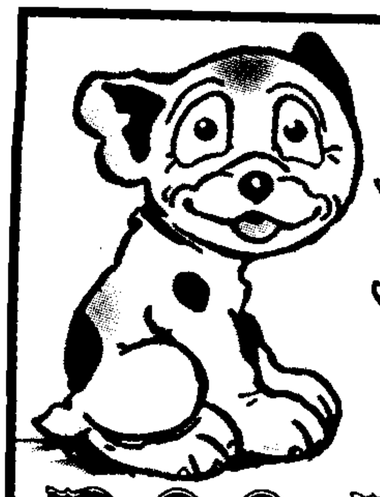

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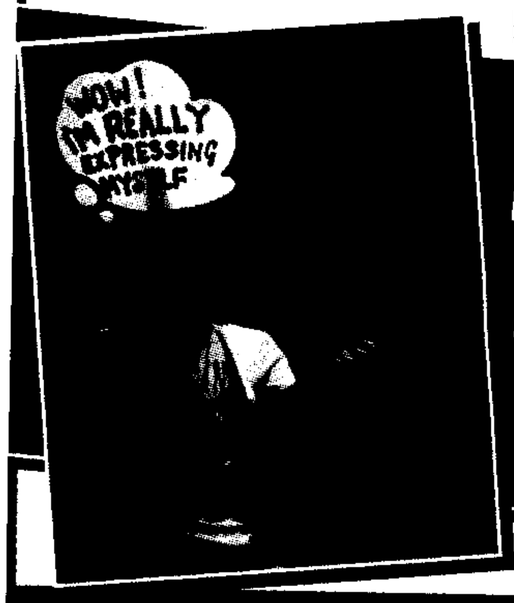

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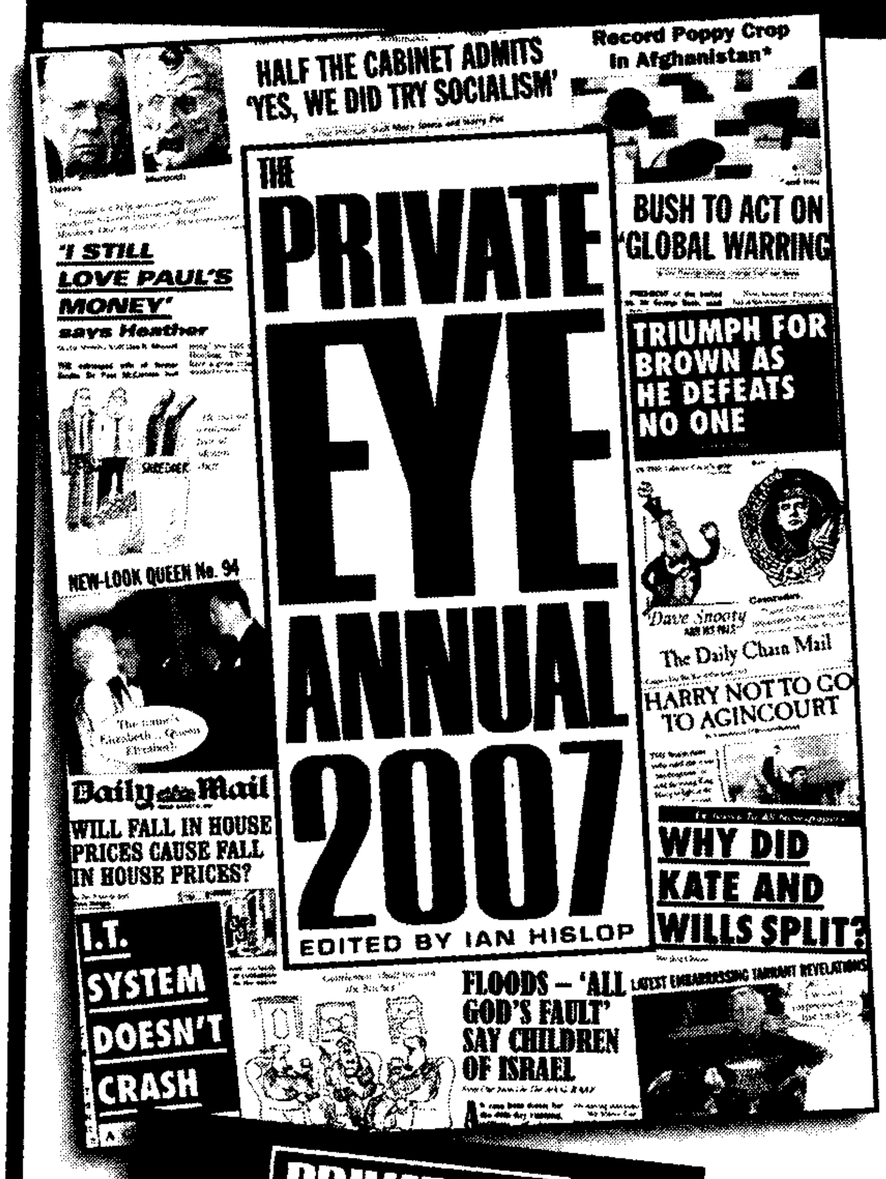
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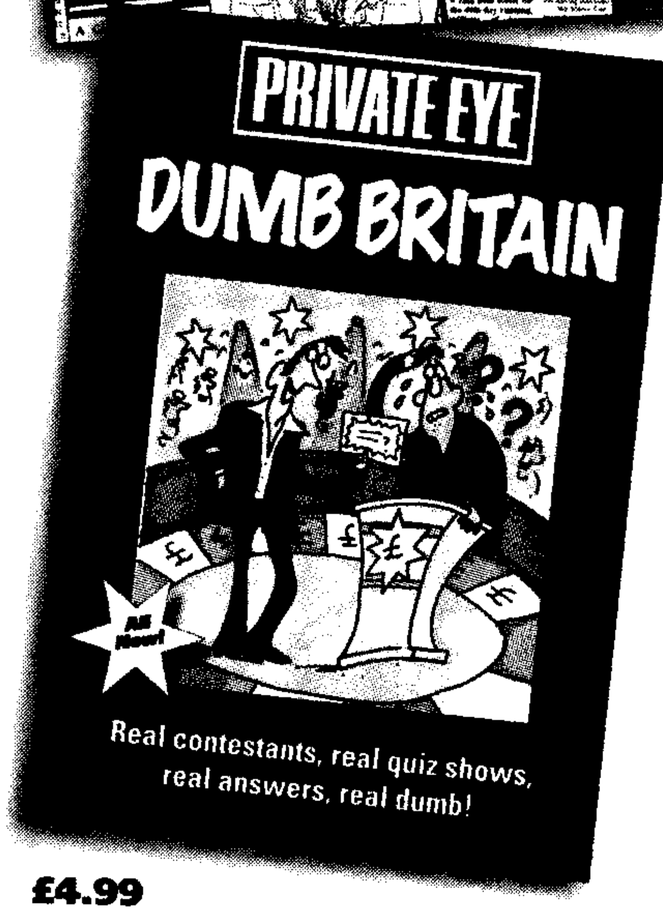

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CONTESTANT: Pig.
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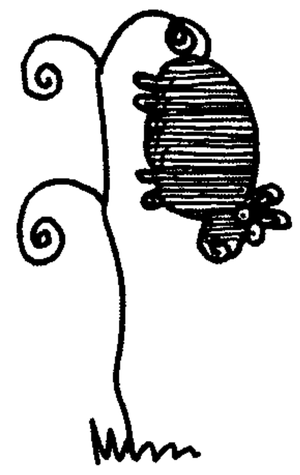
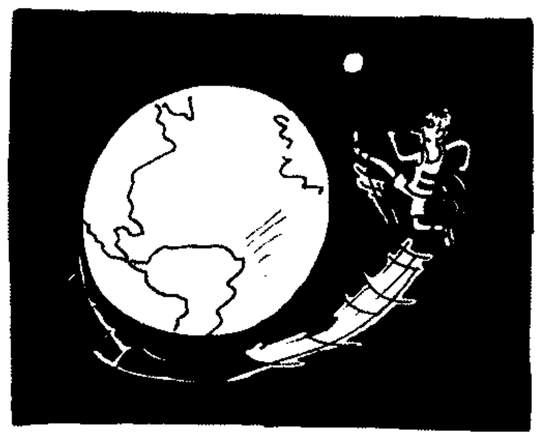


MICHAEL BARRYMORE: What did Roger Bannister do in under four minutes in 1954?
CONTESTANT: Orbit the earth?
Strike It Rich, Challenge



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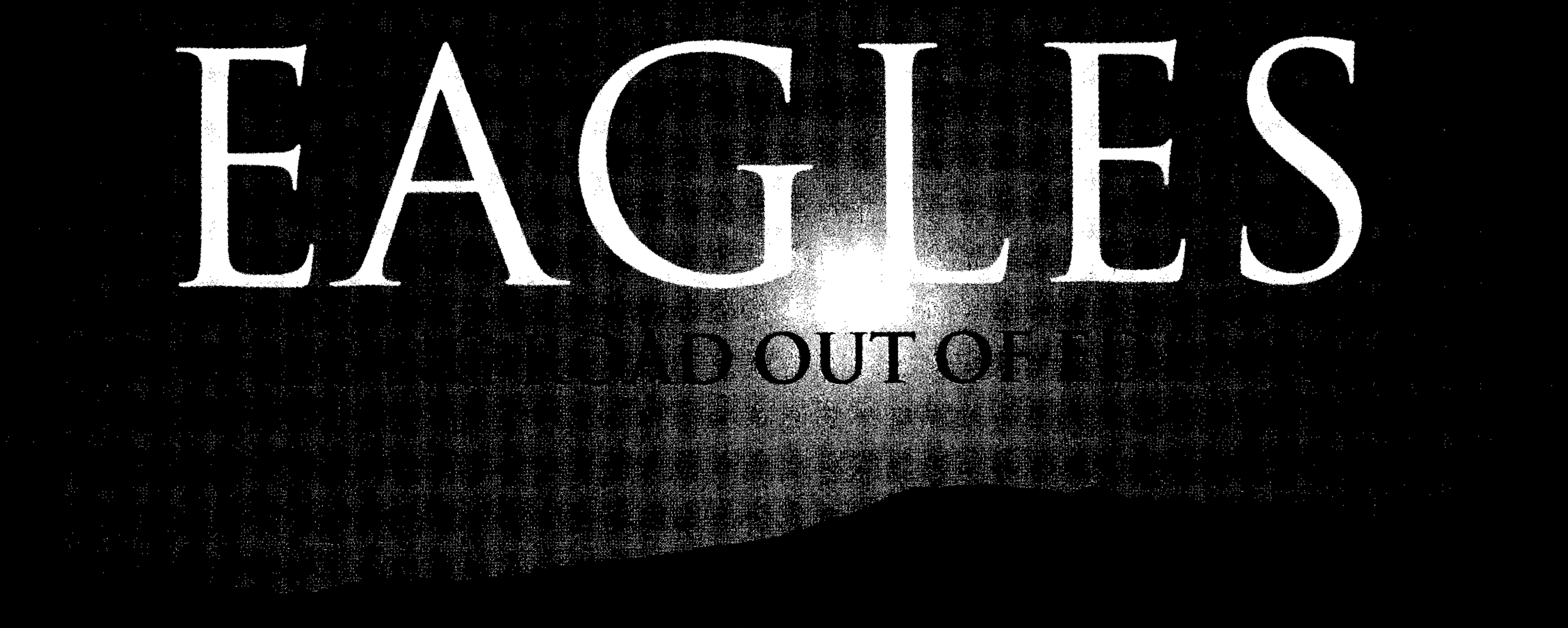

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MI5 SUED in Florida Federal Court for assault / attempted homicide, http://www.mi5.com/legal/orlando/orlando.htm

A CD OF MY POETRY is shortly to be released, but someone is trying to wreck things by leaving pernicious comments on the "Meester Nik" website. Does anybody feel able to leave some (undeservedly) supportive comments about me there? Bright blessings. Andrew Tait.

Eye Need

WAR VETERAN. STILL traumatised, cannot cope any longer. Urgently need finance to retain a semblance of normality for myself. S/C: 08-93-00. A/C: 04224989.

GROUND-BREAKING neural stem cells PhD currently unexploited, thanks! S/C: 20-16-99. A/C: 30454060.

DESPERATELY NEED DEPOSIT for first home. Any help welcome! S/C: 11-06-20. A/C: 00301997.

LONDON JAZZ DRUMMER'S Bowie art project in crisis. Launch at LJF in one month. £3K needed desperately. S/C: 60-14-37. A/C: 58545441. dylan.howe@yahoo.co.uk

HARD WORKING LAW STUDENT frantically struggling to pay course fees / rent. Any support (up to £1200) received with gratitude. S/C: 20-27-20. A/C: 50808717.

SECONDARY SCHOOL psychology teacher, spending half-term giving dreary classroom complete makeover and replenishing dated resources. Any financial support appreciatively received. Up to £1350 S/C: 60-09-05. A/C:10398430.

WORTHY ARTIST and animator of modest means would like to propose a solution to the paradox and crisis of the London Tube. It will mean the end of all delays and suffering on the underground; air conditioning for hot summers no longer necessary. Plausible solution. Needs open-minded listeners to receive dharma. Please email friendly greetings to info@timjerram.co.uk to receive proposals.

DESPERATELY SEEKING DONATIONS to support the finest green / environmental festivals in the UK – by education, accessibility, sustainability and co-operation. Thank you. S/C: 60-13-09. A/C: 41535235.

EIGHT MISCARRIAGES: two beautiful children. Skint. 42. Want to stay at home. Please help. S/C: 20-18-15. A/C: 80910309.

TALENTED ARTIST NEEDS HELP, 20K to recover from recent trauma. S/C: 20-71-74. A/C: 60564672 or, please acquire some of my beautiful works. www.kaplan.4me.pl

DYING TO GET DIRTY. Professional Notting Hill girl gagging to become a full-time potter. Calling all generous patrons... strivingpotter@hotmail.co.uk

OSCAR WILDE is once again dying beyond his means. Please keep me alive. S/C: 08-92-88. A/C: 03252774.

HARD-WORKING DAD recently diagnosed incurable cancer, seeks assistance to provide for future of daughter 10 A* GCSEs. All help gratefully received. S/C 40-61-99. A/C 04420982. Ref: PM.

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RIPPED OFF FOR 40K. Desperate, please, please help. S/C: 40-47-84. A/C: 72016583. Blondiehelp@hotmail.co.uk

PARANOID SHIZOPHRENIC in horrendous debt. All donations gratefully received. S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 61870230.

HUSBAND WALKED OUT, left debts. Desperate, please help! S/C: 80-08-64. A/C: 00117604. http://darkdaysdiaries.blogspot.com

CARER NEEDS HELP in paying off debts of £25,000; any help greatly appreciated. S/C: 40-47-05. A/C: 51427369.

NEED ADJACENT HOUSE FOR MUM, (86), to look after her since my brother died. Buy-to-let mortgage. Found deposit. Need £8K retention / repairs. Please help. S/C: 01-02-77. A/C: 25046802. Email: cath@qtsmcr.freeserve.co.uk

DOWN NOT OUT IN CROYDON. Please help. Thank you. S/C: 40-47-86. A/C: 21678507. Reply Box 220776.

FREE STORAGE REQUIRED for mental health project. South West London. Reply Box 220868.

TSUNAMI SURVIVOR seeks generous assistance with £720 air fare for 3rd anniversary return trip, please help! S/C: 30-99-71. A/C: 01077400.

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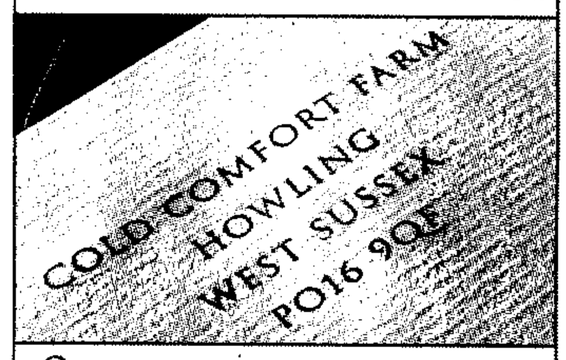

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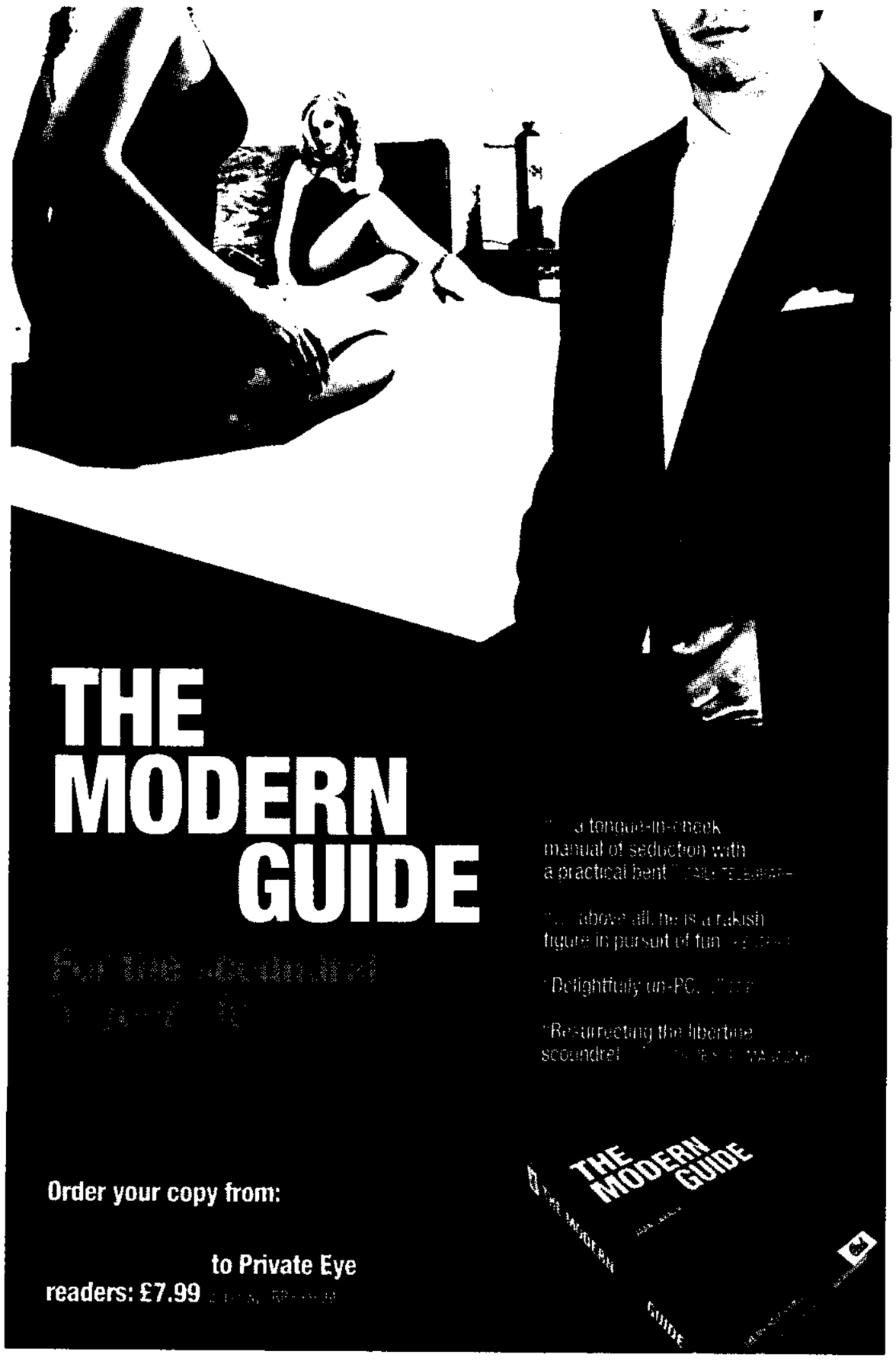
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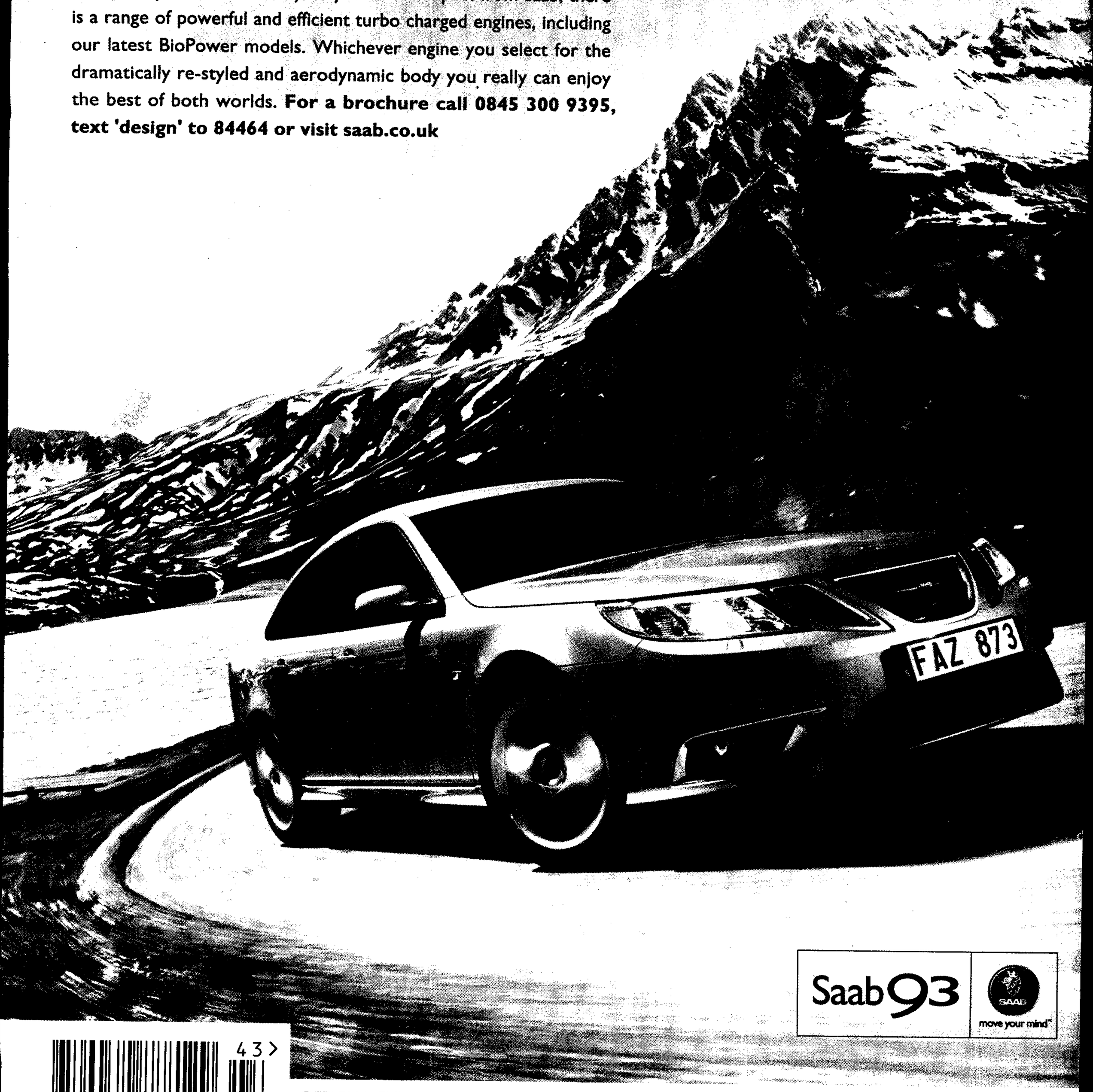

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